

SYMBOLIC GENDER ROLE REVERSAL AND TOUCHSTONE CRITICISM:
THE FEMINIST RHETORIC OF GLORIA STEINEM

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze a sampling of Gloria Steinem's feminist rhetoric by way of "If Men Could Menstruate" (1978/1983) and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" (1994). I use a historical-descriptive methodology, in which I situate each essay in terms of their historical contexts and I closely analyze Steinem's rhetoric in light of each historical situation. I also examine "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" in terms of their enduring contributions. Towards this end, I consider whether or not these essays are touchstones of feminist criticism, meaning that a text meets audience demands and stands the test of time. Focusing on these two essays is necessary because they are memorable, they have received popular acclaim, they function as a pair and they transcend the boundaries of second wave feminism.

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Chapter 1

Introducing the Rhetoric of Gloria Steinem

Introduction

In 1978, Gloria Steinem asked what if men could menstruate. In 1994, she asked what if Freud were Phyllis. Steinem's questions, while at first glance are odd, help set up her argument against gendered oppression by using role-reversal – a strategy she used throughout her career to advocate feminism. Steinem's essays "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" span two waves of feminist movement. First published in *Ms.*, these essays were reprinted in Steinem's *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983) and *Moving Beyond Words* (1994). These essays are memorable, even today. Just this year in the *New York Times*, Zugar referred to "If Men Could Menstruate" as "a hoary 1978 classic" and in the *U.S.A. Today*, Steinem's politics in "If Men Could Menstruate" were compared to the likes of Hillary Clinton: "As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has stated, 'Human rights are women's rights.' ...I'd put this commentary right up there with classics such as Gloria Steinem's 'If Men Could Menstruate'" (Thakor, p. 8A). In 1998 Campbell referred to "If Men Could Menstruate" as a "particular favorite" (p. 113). Likewise, the same can be said for "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" For example, in *The Observer*, "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" was referred to as "one of her most biting and playful essays" to date (2000, p. 9). When *Moving Beyond Words* came out in paperback in 1995, the essay was touted as the "best piece" of Steinem's entire collection (Doris, p. H20). In this way, not only do Steinem's texts teach us about her rhetoric by offering important examples of feminist advocacy; these essays are also memorable and etched in collective memory. Although Steinem's essays remain part of pop culture fodder, rhetorical scholars have not examined either essay in a systematic way. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is

to examine “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” in order to illuminate how these texts work in a historical context and in an enduring way.

Critical problems

Steinem’s rhetoric generally, and her essays “If Men Could Menstruate” (1978) and “What if Freud Were Phyllis?” (1994) in particular, are misunderstood by popular audiences and largely ignored by academic critics. Scholarship on second wave feminism has focused less on Gloria Steinem and more on the media that popularized her messages, including television and *Ms.* Many reactions to “If Men Could Menstruate” do not move beyond the topic of menstruation. However, some responses to that essay and “What if Freud Were Phyllis?” are better aligned with Steinem’s strategic purpose, which is to illuminate and eradicate gender-based oppression predicated on notions of woman’s supposed sociological and biological inferiority. Still, these responses remain just that – reactions rather than rhetorical analyses. In fact, few rhetorical analyses exist in Communication Studies. As Bonnie Dow (2005) points out, “We have more essays on the feminist implications of *Ally McBeal* than on central works of the second wave” (p. 104). This study will address the misunderstanding of and lack of attention to Gloria Steinem’s rhetoric by way of her two essays “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?”.

Steinem’s essays have been misunderstood in three main ways. First, some reviewers have focused primarily or exclusively on the absurdity of Steinem’s use of menstruation. For example, in a 1980 *Washington Post* review, “The Jokes That Ms.’d,” Stephanie Mansfield writes, “Take menstruation...please. Several pages are devoted to the topic with women as bright as Gloria Steinem yukking it up over tampon jokes” (p. B1). In a 1990 review of *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, the reviewer labels “If Men Could Menstruate” “smut” and goes

on to say, “There are chapters – I swear I am not making this up – on ‘Erotica vs. Pornography’ and ‘If Men Could Menstruate.’ I don’t know about you, but I blushed” (Stein, 1990, p. 1B).

Second, some reviewers have accused Steinem of being too accommodating. Towards this end, a 1983 review of *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* critiques Steinem’s approach for giving in to the status quo and therefore being “the acceptable face of feminism” (Carter, p. 1). On the other hand, in a dissertation titled “Rethinking American Feminism,” the author writes, “Gloria Steinem’s thought occupies the boundary between liberal and radical feminism...throughout her work there is discernible tension between the two approaches” (Elizabeth, 2001, p. 79). These responses to Steinem’s rhetoric illustrate that classifying her feminist advocacy is an issue and that her rhetoric may transcend the usual categories.

Third, some reviewers have suggested that Steinem’s rhetoric is irrelevant to the issues of the day. In 1983, one such reviewer suggests Steinem is out of touch: “She is living in a time when young women at her own alma mater call her an anachronism. Her role is more complicated – and more questioned – than ever” (Bumiller, p. B1). Similarly a review of *Moving Beyond Words* suggests Steinem’s treatment of Freud is passé. Janice Harayada writes, “Had such an essay appeared in the ‘70s or ‘80s, it might have been as timely as it is trenchant. Not so today, when almost every week brings a new account of a bogus recollection of a ‘repressed’ memory, reaffirming that Freud’s professional descendants can inflict as much harm on men as on women” (1994, p. 11J). These critiques speak to the fact that criticism of Steinem has been shallow and dismissive. A more careful reading of Steinem’s rhetoric is therefore warranted.

Some reviewers, however, have treated Steinem’s topic choice and humor as serious advocacy on behalf of women. When Steinem first published “If Men Could Menstruate” in *Ms.* magazine, a reader and professor of anthropology suggested her essay reveals that a biological

rationale for gender inequity is false: “I enjoyed your essay ‘If Men Could Menstruate’...and would like to refer your readers to some anthropological data on ‘male menstruating’...penile bloodletting may thus represent male menstrual *envy*, just as woman’s power to give birth is also enough to give men pause” (Smith, 1979, p. 7). One apt critique of “What If Freud Were Phyllis” notes, “more than any other brief text I have read, this essay simply revokes, cancels and terminates the reader’s ability to take gender inequity for granted” (Limerick, 1994, XI). Reviewer Patricia Holt suggests it is “a devilishly funny and instructive essay...Steinem’s fictional biographer cannot over-praise the ‘genius’ of Phyllis Freud in discovering the womb as ‘the very source of originality’...If it all sounds too silly to believe, that of course is Steinem’s point” (1994, p. 1). Moreover, another reviewer notes that Steinem’s writing addresses gender-based oppression or “the theme of how the confines of gender play upon women’s hearts, minds, bodies and pocketbooks” (Fichtner, 1994, p. 6E). Reviewer Naomi Black praises Steinem’s serious goals: “Steinem expresses persuasively the deeply radical hopes for a social transformation...[and its creation of] a world, in which gender does not determine power” (1983, p. 1). These reviews, however, are just that – reviews rather than rhetorical analyses.

Likewise, although Steinem’s biographers clearly situate the context in which she wrote, they do not analyze her writings. Some biographers offer insight into the convictions that influence Steinem’s writing and inform her arguments. For example, Carolyn Helibrun, author of *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem* (1995), writes, “Steinem had no respect for the Freudian treatment of women” and especially perceived Freud as lacking the ability to “trust women’s experiences or believe women’s words” (1995, p. 374). Sydney Ladenshoen Stern, author of *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (1997), offers both praise and critique of Steinem’s writing. Stern (1997) calls “If Men Could Menstruate” “clever” and

argues that Steinem's role reversal technique in "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" is successful in reaching a feminist audience (pp. 412-413). Generally, biographers summarize Steinem's essays, provide background information regarding the context of her writing or offer brief assessments of the essays. However, they do not develop rhetorical analysis designed to account for how the essays function in situated context for a particular audience.

Similarly, scholars who have anthologized "If Men Could Menstruate" note Steinem's serious goals but do not generate rhetorical analysis to explain how her rhetoric functions to achieve them. For example, Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner's *Redressing the Balance: American Women's Literary Humor from Colonial Times to the 1980's* (1988) and *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture* (1988) both mention Gloria Steinem's "If Men Could Menstruate." While brief, the authors situate Steinem's work within a larger tradition of feminist humor. Walker and Dresner find, "Steinem's humor is similar to that of Nora Ephron in its commonsense exposure of the absurdity of sexism, and in this respect she is also in the tradition of Marietta Holly, Alice Duer Miller, and other writers that have satirized men's supposed superiority" (1988, p. 428-429). Walker argues that in "If Men Could Menstruate," Steinem "points to the absurdity of a cultural system based on gender inequality" and implicitly, her method for dismantling them (1988, p. 152). Neither anthology includes "What if Freud Were Phyllis?"

These comments point to functions and purposes of Steinem's writing. Steinem sought to destroy societal-based gender inequity by dismantling arguments predicated on biology and long-standing cultural myths and she used humorous role-reversal strategies, among others, to do so. The aim of this project is to pick up where these reviews and other scholarly works left off by

providing rhetorical analysis that accounts for how her rhetoric functions in “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” in a historical context and in an enduring way.

Rationale for the Project

Steinem’s essays “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” warrant critical attention for two main reasons. First, Steinem and her rhetoric are important, but few have studied it, and the studies that exist focus on ephemeral work in *Ms.* and not on iconic essays. Second, careful attention to Steinem’s essays is necessary because there is a need to look at foundational texts of second wave feminism.

First, Steinem’s rhetoric is important. In 1984 Steinem was introduced “as a foremother of feminism” before a talk at San Diego State University, home to the nation’s oldest women’s studies department (Dudley, p. E1). But long before 1984, Steinem made a name for herself. Ruth Rosen’s examination of contemporary feminism documents Steinem’s long relationship to the movement: “she spent...three decades traveling, lecturing, writing, editing, publishing and campaigning for women’s liberation” (2000, p. 209). Moreover, due in large part to *Ms.* magazine’s early success, Steinem became the face of popular feminism. However, she wasn’t just another liberal feminist. Rosen (2000) writes,

The product of a working-class home, she made special efforts to enlist the privileged to assist poor and minority women. She defended lesbians and worked to create coalitions with women of color. She traveled the country with Flo Kennedy...speaking to all kinds of groups about the need for a new women’s movement. For decades, she dedicated herself to a movement that did always appreciate her generosity of spirit or her ecumenical inclusiveness. (p. 217)

Clearly, Steinem's many contributions to feminism cannot be underestimated and ought to be examined more closely. Amanda Izzo, an archives assistant for the Sophia Smith Collection, which holds Gloria Steinem's papers, writes, "To this day, she remains a powerful symbol of feminism" (2002, p. 151). Izzo goes on to say that "Steinem struck a chord with the general public" (2002, p. 152). In fact, Steinem has been so popular that she is the topic of other scholarly projects. For example, Bruce Tucker's dissertation used Steinem and others to "to develop a feminist perspective of the gender related issues connected to competition" (1997, p. 1). Projects like this are important because they demonstrate the wide appeal of Gloria Steinem. At the same time, they do not analyze Steinem's writing from a rhetorical perspective. Ultimately, Steinem's pivotal role in the feminist movement points to the need to study her rhetoric.

In addition, the influence of Steinem's rhetoric makes her worthy of critical attention. Patricia Bradley, author of *Mass Media and American Feminism* (2003), suggests Steinem's messages are memorable and cast a wide net, influencing millions of American women as well men. Bradley (2003) states, "Steinem was personally responsible for much of the dispersal of the feminist message over the mass media landscape" (p. 165). Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003), editors of *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, assert, "Steinem's...ability to speak to the particular demands of her time is precisely what made her effective" (p. 162). Steinem is thus well known as a front-runner of the second wave feminist movement.

Unfortunately, Steinem and second wave feminist rhetoric have not received much critical attention. The legacy of the first wave of feminism has been researched by rhetorical critics. Bonnie Dow (2005) points out, "scholars have been able to construct a hegemonic

narrative and teleology for the first wave” (p. 90). Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989) includes two volumes of critical essays on first-wave speakers and speeches. Campbell provides an outline for future studies to examine individual speakers and draw out their contributions to feminism more broadly. Lisa Hogan and Michael Hogan’s “Feminine Virtue and Practical Wisdom: Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s ‘Our Boys’” (2003) analyzes Stanton’s speech. Nathan Stormer (1999) offers a similar model of analysis when he examines Stanton’s “The Solitude of Self.” Finally, Bonnie Dow’s study of the rhetoric of Frances Willard (1991) and A. Cheree Carlson’s study of Lucretia Coffin Mott (1994) are also examples of studies of first wave feminist rhetoric from the perspective of individual speakers. The models of scholarship from the first wave serve as helpful exemplars of rhetorical analysis.

The second wave on the other hand does not have a similar body of research. Bonnie Dow (2005) argues the second wave is “a messier movement” in comparison to the first wave (p. 90). The second wave witnessed a variety of competing voices and often contentious viewpoints among feminist activists, which makes it difficult to identify one emergent, definitive leader. As Dow (2005) suggests, the second wave “had no equivalent to Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Martin Luther King, Jr.” (p. 90). Furthermore, splits within the movement were prevalent and heavily publicized, which also indicates the lack of a central figure. For example, Patricia Bradley (2003) writes, Steinem “was not embraced by all feminists” (p. 165). Steinem too has resisted being labeled a figurehead of the feminist movement. As Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2003) note, “Steinem believes that no one person represents feminism” (p. 159). The history of Steinem’s organizing suggests the same trend. For example, when Steinem started the Women’s Action Alliance in 1972, she sought to facilitate an organization that was anti-hierarchical; the alliance was established “to serve as an information house” (Bradley, 2003, p. 166).

The difficulty of studying second wave feminism from the perspective of individual rhetors is exacerbated by some assumptions of feminist theory. On the whole, feminist theory is anti-hierarchical and focuses on incorporating traditionally marginalized voices. This standpoint is inspired by second wave feminist activists who perceived the movement as a shared responsibility. As Bonnie Dow (2005) writes, “feminists opposed hierarchy in any form and eschewed the notion of leadership” (p. 90). This assumption helps to account for why scholarship on second wave feminist rhetoric has not studied individual rhetors to the extent that first wave scholarship has.

The challenges posed by the second wave and feminist theory help to explain why, in Dow’s words, “the rhetorical scholarship devoted to it is smaller and less cohesive” (2005, p. 90). Without an iconic leader, second wave feminism lacks a representative prototype easily identifiable and available for rhetorical analysis. Campbell’s “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation” (1973) is one example of scholarship analyzing second wave rhetoric and responding to this dilemma. Furthermore, other studies have opted out of using the “great speaker” model when approaching the second wave. For example, Bonnie Dow (2005) writes, “I have focused my own work about the second wave almost exclusively on the rhetorical strategies of dominant media representations of movement activities and ideas rather than on the discourse of its rhetoric” (p. 90). Thus, conflicts within the movement and its anti-hierarchical ideology pose challenges to studying second wave feminism from the perspective of an individual rhetor.

My project aims to meet these challenges by focusing on two of Steinem’s essays, “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” I also recognize that it is imperative to consider Steinem within the historical context of second wave feminism, which means identifying the diversity of voices within the movement.

Methodology

In order to understand Steinem's rhetoric, I propose to examine "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" from a historical-descriptive perspective. I also propose to examine "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis" in terms of their enduring contributions. I will consider whether or not these essays are touchstones of feminist criticism, meaning that a text meets audience demands and stands the test of time. Focusing on these two essays is necessary because they are memorable, they have received popular acclaim, they function as a pair and they transcend the boundaries of second wave feminism.

These essays deserve critical attention in part because they are iconic. In 1984, *The Washington Post* reported Steinem's *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* was on the bestseller list; *The New York Times* listed her text as among the notable books of 1983. Sydney Ladenson Stern (1997) describes "If Men Could Menstruate" as one of Steinem's "most reprinted essays" (p. 335). "If Men Could Menstruate" is also controversial. Carolyn Helibrun (1995) reports that, "If Men Could Menstruate elicited much feedback from outraged station affiliates, some of whom refused to carry it" after Steinem read the essay on a CBS radio show *Spectrum* (p. 314). Thus, Steinem's rhetorical inventiveness turns off some respondents – in this case, even literally. The potency of her words in this essay in particular needs to be unpacked. The accolades Steinem received as a result of these essays suggest that her rhetoric resonates with many audiences.

Steinem met the same success with *Moving Beyond Words*. In a *New York Times* book review, Maureen Corrigan (1994) notes, "In her best writing...collected in her next book, *Moving Beyond Words*, Ms. Steinem engages in some very adept ideological demystification"

(p. 1). A book editor also praises “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” as a “tour de force...[that] leaves the stunned reader with an unsettling question: Why have we allowed ourselves to be manipulated by this nonsense all these years?” (Fry, 1994 p. F1). “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” a reviewer remarks, “has probably gotten the most public response” (Karkabi, 1994, p. 1). *Publisher’s Weekly* submits that “Steinem is at her polemical best...She invents ‘Dr. Phyllis Freud,’ founder of psychoanalysis, who provided that men’s lack of wombs make them terminally envious and whose theories serve as a scientific rationale for men’s lower status in a matriarchal society” (1994, p. 50). *Moving Beyond Words* receives praise especially because it traverses the ranks of class. A reviewer suggests, “If one wanted to make it more likely that women of privilege would find solidarity with women from lower rungs on the economic ladder, giving them copies of *Moving Beyond Words* would rank as a very promising strategy” (Limerick, 1994, p. 1). Finally, a reviewer notes, “sometimes it takes the aberration, or the extreme, to see just how confining social expectations of women are...[Steinem] demonstrates feminism’s vitality and relevance” (Hegger, 1994, p. 5C). Steinem’s writing is important because it makes clear, as Maureen Corrigan notes, “that what appears to be ‘natural’ is, in fact, socially constructed” (1994, p. 1). There is ample praise for Steinem yet there are minimal rhetorical analyses that account for her writing.

“If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” function as a pair. Steinem notes that “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” was born out of “If Men Could Menstruate.” In Phyllis Freud’s fictional biography, Steinem (1994) writes, “Like all of us, Phyllis Freud was born of two parents. Her mother was an improvisation I used to do at lectures in the 1970s, which finally grew into an essay called ‘If Men Could Menstruate’” (p. 19). Also, the essays are a pair because they both exhibit a similar rhetorical style. That is, they both contain gender-role

reversal to make a case for destroying gender inequity. Furthermore, both of Steinem's essays couch arguments in feminist humor. Steinem's rhetorical style indicates the existence of generic norms that apply to her specifically and possibly to the second wave more generally.

Steinem's essays also transcend the boundaries of the second wave. "If Men Could Menstruate" was originally published in 1978 in *Ms.* magazine and again in 1983 in Steinem's first book *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. Arguably, its original publication date coincides with the tail end of the second wave. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier note the "women's movement has been culturally marked by the period of its rebirth" from 1967-1975 (2004, p. 311). Similarly, Sara Evans marks the second wave "from about 1968-1975" (2003, pp. 62-63). "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" was published in 1994. By this time, feminist movement was staging the third wave of activism. Steinem's essay is not classified as third wave rhetoric however. Evans (2003) argues that "the third wave [that] appeared in the mid-1990s...set out to claim a place within feminism distinct from that of their literal and figurative mothers" (p. 230). Steinem, who many consider a "foremother" of second wave feminism, clearly does not meet the third wave categorization (see Dudley, 1984). As a consequence, Steinem's essays do not coincide with just one "wave" of feminist activism and they do not fit neatly into the third wave of feminism either. This nuance makes them good objects of study because they help address the critical question of how to classify Steinem's rhetoric.

I propose the following methodology for examining "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" First, I will situate both essays in their historical context. I will account for the status of the feminist movement generally and Steinem's role therein. Second, I will perform a close textual analysis of each essay in light of the barriers that Steinem faced given the historical contexts in 1978/1983 and 1994. Third, I will evaluate the rhetorical

strategies of each essay and account for why the essays continue to speak to readers today. My evaluation of the essays in an enduring way will be based on whether or not they are touchstones of feminist rhetoric.

Overview of Chapters

The second chapter will situate “What If Men Could Menstruate” in its historical context and analyze the essay. The third chapter will situate “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” in its historical context and analyze the essay. In examining both essays I will explain what Steinem’s purposes are and how she attempts to achieve them for her immediate audience. In the fourth chapter I will evaluate Steinem’s rhetorical strategies. Specifically, I will address the rhetorical strategies she used and why she was successful or not successful in making her essays memorable in an enduring way. The fifth chapter will discuss implications and directions for future research.

Conclusion

I will contribute to our understanding of second wave feminist rhetoric and Steinem’s rhetoric specifically by examining her essays “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” These essays are interrelated and use a similar style. As they are texts of the women’s movement, Steinem’s ideas provide a window into the political agenda of feminism at the time of their publication. Moreover, her essays illustrate the politicization of gender as well as individual and collective responses to oppression that is institutionalized, internalized and legitimated in our culture. Thus, Steinem’s pieces illustrate who she is as a feminist and the gender politics that she sought to engage. Examination of Steinem’s essays will fill a significant gap in scholarship on second wave rhetors.

Gloria Steinem is as relevant today as she ever was. As recently as 2008, she stated that, “gender is probably the most restricting force in American life” (p. 1). “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” provide a starting point for discovering exactly how Steinem legitimates the aforementioned claim. Despite her relevance, there are limited rhetorical analyses of Steinem’s writings. Steinem’s ability to stay current suggests she has staying power. Arguably, Steinem planted that seed early when she wrote “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” In order to understand Steinem’s contributions to feminist rhetoric, we must start with some of her most important and foundational texts

Chapter 2

A Popular Feminist Theory: Steinem's "If Men Could Menstruate"

Introduction

Gloria Steinem used to say a female taxi driver once told her, "Honey, if men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament" (Walker & Dresner, 1988, p. 429). In 1978, Steinem published "If Men Could Menstruate," which appeared in the November issue of *Ms.* magazine. Five years later, Steinem included the essay in a collection of her most popular works for her first book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983).

Steinem's book was an immediate success. One of Steinem's biographers, Sydney Ladensohn Stern (1997), writes, "The book generally received favorable reviews, leaped onto the bestseller lists within a few weeks, and sold around 100,000 copies" (p. 334). One reason *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* fared so well is that Steinem's rhetoric had wide appeal, reaching a broad swath of American women. As Stern (1997) points out, "Instead of feminist theory, she offered readers feminism in everyday life" (p. 335). Carolyn Helibrun, another biographer, agrees: "Steinem's refusal to sound more learned or knowledgeable than her audience would always simultaneously grate on intellectuals and inspire large parts of the reading public" (1995, p. 348). It is not surprising then that Steinem also avoided academic language in her magazine *Ms.* because she perceived it as "unnecessary wordiness" and "obscure language" (Farrell, 1997, p. 123). In 1995 she told *Mother Jones* magazine that academic feminist writing is "gobbledygook" and full of "this silly language that nobody can understand" (as cited in Gorney, p. 22). Steinem joked, "If I read the word 'problematize' one more time, I'm going to vomit" and she also said, "If I hear people talking about 'feminist praxis' – I mean, it's practice, say practice," showing her clear disdain for academic feminism (as cited in Gorney,

1995, p. 22). Steinem was committed to communicating feminism on her own terms and to the masses.

In this chapter I argue that Gloria Steinem's "If Men Could Menstruate" functions as popular feminist theory in two ways. First, "If Men Could Menstruate" theorizes topically, outlining Steinem's feminist agenda. Second, "If Men Could Menstruate" theorizes by enacting core values. Steinem theorizes for all women by drawing upon four strategies:

1) humor, 2) the topic of menstruation, 3) focusing on a range of issues, and 4) ordinary dialogue. First, I outline the historical context in which Steinem crafted her argument. Second, I analyze Steinem's essay in light of the historical context.

Situating Second Wave Feminism

Gloria Steinem faced several challenges beginning in 1978 and extending into 1983. In 1978, Steinem described feminism thusly:

This seems to be where we are 10 years or so into the second wave of feminism. Raised hopes, a hunger for change, and years of hard work are running head-on into a frustrating realization that each battle must be fought over and over again at different depths, and that one inevitable result of winning the majority to some changed consciousness is a backlash from those forces whose power depended on the old one. (as cited in Evans, 2003, p. 174)

The status of the feminist movement, according to Steinem, reflected the reality of the time: feminists had achieved many successes; however, they still had unachieved goals. Furthermore, one consequence of their successes was an increasingly vocal opposition. When Steinem published "If Men Could Menstruate," she faced three main challenges: 1) Steinem needed to overcome ideological differences that splintered the feminist movement and unify women,

2) Steinem needed to publicly advocate a political agenda and portray the feminist movement as a unified front that represented a diverse cross-section of American women, and 3) Steinem needed to reclaim popular feminism from an increasingly successful opposition that said feminism was over and for all women whose movement tactics had divided them.

The Challenge of Competing Feminist Agendas

1975 marked a “watershed” year for the feminist movement (Ryan, 1992). Specifically, scholars suggest that the feminist movement in the mid-1970s was rocked by ideological splits, conflicting agendas, and disagreements over the best way to advance a feminist agenda. In 1975, Ellen Willis, who worked as a contributing editor to *Ms.* magazine, described the state of the movement in a memo to the magazine’s staffers: “The movement is fragmented, confused, torn by major political splits” (as cited in Thom, 1997, p. 81). As a result of fragmentation, “the movement as an organized force for social change was a lackluster imitation of its former self” (Wandersee, 1988, p. 197). The shifts in the feminist movement that started in the mid-1970s continued to influence feminism well into the late 1970s and early 1980s. Rhetorically speaking, changes within the movement made it difficult “to articulate a popular, diverse feminism” (Farrell, 1997, p. 99). Steinem’s challenge therefore was to unify what had clearly become a fragmented feminist movement.

The feminist movement split ideologically between reformist and radical versions of feminism. Women differed over their agenda and the tactics to carry out that agenda. Therefore, the split involved both substantive issues as well as how they were presented publicly. Evans (2003) writes that while the split “raged on ideological issues,” it “frequently rested more on differences of emphasis, tone, and style” (p. 107). In this way, the split over ideology was a rhetorical one too.

Reformist feminists grounded their identity in the notion of equality between the sexes. Women sought equality legally, in the workplace, and in their own homes (Maddux, 2008). Evans (2003) argues the notion of “equality” “made a reasonable, liberal request for legal and economic equity” (p. 24). Reformist feminists perceived the root of their oppression “in social and legal constraints based on gender. Once those constraints were removed, women would be ‘full partners’” (Bradley, 2003, p. 48). Therefore, reformists believed that their equality could be achieved within the system. Or as Chafe (1994) writes, “implicit in this approach was a willingness to accept as basically sound the existing structure of the society...integration, not separation was its goal” (pp. 66-67). The National Organization for Women (NOW) enacted the quintessential example of reform feminism (Maddux, 2008). In its founding statement in 1966, NOW committed to “take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming the privileges and responsibility thereof in truly equal partnership with men” (as cited in Evans, 2003, p. 24). Reform feminists’ movement efforts focused on legal tactics, including lobbying in Washington, D.C. and picketing organizations that did not afford equal opportunity between the sexes (Berkeley, 1999). NOW for example “used court cases, lobbied with Congress, and pressured the President to lower barriers against women” (p. 67).

Radical feminists, on the other hand, perceived society as fundamentally flawed and therefore “emphasized the need to turn society upside down by acting collectively to attack the roots of women’s oppression” (Chafe, 1994, p. 68). Bradley (2003) writes that radicals “sought major restructuring of society” (p. 48). Women who identified as radical feminists focused on the notion of “liberation” and perceived themselves as “revolutionaries,” as opposed to reformists (Evans, 2003). As a result, they helped to coin the term “the women’s liberation movement.”

Radical feminists pinpointed patriarchy – “those social, economic, and cultural institutions that supported male supremacy” – as the source of their subordination (Chafe, 1994, p. 68). Unlike reformists, radicals perceived “the class of men” as their oppressor and institutions like “corporations, schools, churches and [the] government” as replications of domination, that put women in an inferior, subjugated position (Chafe, 1994, p. 69). The organizational tactics of radicals rejected the idea of creating change within institutions. Bradley (2003) writes that radicals “viewed their identity in terms of marginality, [and] saw benefit in remaining on the edges as the way to articulate options” (p. 192). Maddux (2008) writes that they focused “on the concept of liberation, encouraging the full empowerment of women to live and work in situations of their own design, freeing them from obligation to deeply-embedded, culturally sanctioned structures like marriage, Christianity, and wage labor” (p. 37). Campbell (1973) argues that radical tactics involved small-group consciousness-raising and “the use of confrontative, non-adjustive strategies designed to violate the reality structure” including attack metaphors and symbolic reversals (p. 81). Documents like the “Bitch Manifesto” which claimed that, “liberated women are bitches – aggressive, confident, strong” and organizations such as W.I.T.C.H, the Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell, argued for the “radical affirmation of new identities of women” (Campbell, 1973, p. 82). Chafe (1994) also adds that radical feminists “devoted much of their energy to building woman-defined and woman-run structures. Sometimes these were cultural, such as publishing houses, journals, and newsletters. At other times they were health-related – separate women-run clinics, for example” (p. 69).

Several examples illustrate the clashes taking place in the feminist movement over ideology, agendas and rhetorical strategies during the late 1970s and early 1980s. First, Betty Friedan’s publication of *The Second Stage* (1981) stirred up controversy among feminists.

Marcia Cohen (1988) reports that Friedan's book "irritated many feminists, adding definition to what was a growing tendency to distinguish between 'liberal' and 'radical' feminism" (p. 369). Friedan critiqued the movement saying feminists left out the family or what she called, "our blind spot" (Wandersee, 1988, p. 201). Feminists lashed back at Friedan's claim, arguing that it provided "ammunition for antifeminists" (Wandersee, 1988, p. 201).

Second, other instances of conflict involved Gloria Steinem. Ideologically speaking, Steinem often found herself at odds with Betty Friedan. Evan (2003) writes that Friedan was "never subtle about her irritation at the attention paid to Gloria Steinem" (p. 109). In 1983, *The Washington Post* reported that Friedan "accused Steinem of 'ripping off the movement for private profit'" in reference to Steinem's *Ms.* magazine (Suplee, p. B1). Stern (1997) documents that Friedan "had genuine political differences with" Steinem; "Betty was a reformer," whereas Steinem perceived herself as a revolutionary (p. 253). In *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983) Steinem criticized *The Feminine Mystique* for helping to establish "white-middle-class-movement" as "the catch phrase of journalists describing feminism in the United States" (p. 7). The conflict between Steinem and Friedan demonstrates the larger ideological incompatibility going on with feminism during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Third, feminist organizations, not just individuals, were implicated in the debate over ideological differences. Ryan (1992) reports that NOW "experienced a crisis...which nearly split the organization in two" (p. 71). Specifically, factions within NOW argued about the overall "orientation" of the organization after a "bitterly fought national election" for the organization's presidency in 1975 (Ryan, 1992, p. 71). "Karen DeCrow, a feminist lawyer from New York, won by a narrow margin over Mary Jean Collins-Robson, a long-time NOW activist from Chicago," which caused tension over the direction of NOW (Ryan, 1992, p. 71). Ryan (1992) writes, "the

dispute between the two factions was framed in rhetorical terms of radical and conservative orientations” (p. 72). The fallout of DeCrow’s controversial presidency would haunt NOW for years to come. *Ms.* magazine also suffered from “intra-sisterhood warfare” (Thom, 1997, p. 99). The specific conflict was three-fold. Farrell (1997) writes “the magazine’s precarious union of feminism and capitalism,” the “relationship among readers and editors” and *Ms.*’s “attempt to accommodate two strands of feminism, one emphasizing individual liberty, the other emphasizing shared sisterhood” would all challenge the magazine (pp. 3-5). The problems at *Ms.* illustrate the bigger issue within the women’s movement over feminism’s proper ideological grounding. Clearly some women preferred radicalism while others advocated reform.

In addition to the major split between reformers and radicals, other splits also contributed to the fragmentation of second-wave feminism. For example, new pockets of feminism emerged, making it naturally more difficult for the movement to join together as a cohesive whole. For example, “by 1975, both ‘cultural feminism’ and ‘socialist feminism’ were in full sway” (Evans, 2003, p. 142). Groups led by lesbian separatists, black women, and domestic workers evidenced this phenomenon (Farrell, 1997). Scholars suggest that these feminist groups expanded the movement, resulting in an inevitable fragmentation, as many of their agendas were incompatible from the start. As Farrell (1997) makes clear, “each developed particular theoretical understandings of feminism” (p. 50).

These internal conflicts prompted Gloria Steinem to advocate unification among women. In fact, Steinem had long believed that it was fatalist to the feminist movement to perceive differences as insurmountable. Evans (2003) documents that Steinem was “an interesting link between the various branches of the Second Wave” (p. 93). For example, in 1977 at the National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas, Steinem took pride in helping minority women’s

groups come together: “I was their scribe, finding shared issues, language for the shared issues” (as cited in Helibrun, 1995, p. 317). In 1979, speaking at a feminist convention, Steinem warned, “women will not be ‘taken seriously as a political force’ until they agree to transcend” their personal politics (as cited in Rosenfeld, p. A14). In 1983, Steinem reiterated the need for women to come together at the sixth convention of the National Women’s Political Caucus: “There is a real tactical necessity to come together as women first, to make a psychic turf. Women are the only discriminated-against group that doesn’t have a country, that doesn’t have a neighborhood, that doesn’t have a bar” (Bumiller, 1983b, p. C1). Steinem’s feminist advocacy argued that female unification was not only important; it was central to their success as a movement.

A bulk of Steinem’s writing that appeared in *Ms.* evidences her goal of unifying feminists and making feminism popular. In 1972, Steinem published the essay “Sisterhood” in the premier issue of *Ms.* Steinem argued the differences between women were unimportant compared to what they shared: “sisterhood.” She wrote, “The odd thing about these deep and personal connections among women living under patriarchy is that they often leap barriers of age, economics, worldly experience, race, culture” (1972, p. 123). She also stressed that women will only be successful as a unified group: “I know it will take a coalition of such groups to achieve a society in which, at a minimum, no one is born into a second-class role” (1972, p. 127).

Likewise, Steinem’s essay “Far From the Opposite Shore” highlighted her internal movement agenda and forecasted the rhetorical strategies she would use in “If Men Could Menstruate.” Steinem (1983) wrote, “The most recognizable characteristic of feminists and feminist acts is their effort to be inclusive” (p. 380). Steinem even joked about ideological differences: “The next struggle is much less likely to find radicals ignoring the power of the electoral system, or reformers insisting that all will be well if we just act ladylike, wear skirts,

and avoid controversy” (1983, p. 382). Thus, her writing was clearly aimed at addressing internal tensions within the feminist movement.

The Challenge of Popularizing Feminism and The Rise of the Opposition

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s Gloria Steinem had two main external goals for the feminist movement: 1) expand the number and kinds of issues the movement should address and 2) undercut an increasingly successful feminist opposition as well as a general conservative position that post-feminism had replaced feminism.

Steinem’s second wave agenda

Between 1978 and 1983, Gloria Steinem’s platform reflected the broader goals of the feminist movement. Helibrun (1995) notes that in the late 1970s, Steinem concerned herself with “unequal pay scales for women, battered women, the Carter administration position on choice (he supported it but not for poor women who requested Medicaid), and homophobia, among other topics” (p. 314). Her agenda was consonant with the one developed just one year earlier at The National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas. Although the National Women’s Conference lasted only four days, it is remembered as a “watershed event in women’s history” (Wandersee, 1988, p. 175). Participants proposed a feminist platform, which reflected the general direction of feminist activism including issues such as equal pay, day care, abortion, sex education, violence against women and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and they adopted an official Plan of Action, which they later submitted to President Carter. The conference was also a turning point for the women’s rights movement because it brought national attention to the issues of the day. Mary Thom (1997) writes that because of the conference “The political establishment and the media discovered the ‘gender gap’ and began to recognize women as a force to be reckoned with” (p. 115). Thom (1997) notes “Thousands of women took their first

steps as political and community activists in the process...nearly two decades later, women still told stories about how Houston changed their lives” (p. 115).

The diversity of the Houston conference, reflected in the variety of delegates elected to the gathering, coincided with Steinem’s aim to reach all women. As Thom (1997) suggests, the delegates named to the conference were “the most broadly representative body ever elected in the United States” (p. 115). In *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983), Steinem reflected on Houston with delight for the barriers it broke: “At last there were enough women of color...to have a strong voice” (p. 290).

The other central agenda item for the feminist movement during the late 1970s and the early 1980s was ratification of the ERA. The proposed ERA read “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Steinem was a strong supporter of the ERA: “In the history of this [second] wave of feminism...the campaign for the ERA may appear as the first massive, shared experience that blasted a critical mass of the women’s movement out of its inside-the-system/outside-the-system rut” (1983, p. 352). Steinem was correct; the ERA won the popular support of most feminists. As Ryan (1992) observes, “By 1977, the Equal Rights Amendment was the mobilizing issue for feminist activism” (p. 73). The eventual defeat of the ERA devastated Steinem and the feminist movement generally. Stern (1997) writes, “The Equal Rights Amendment issue provided some of the most frustrating political battles of Gloria’s life” (p. 330). Cohen (1988) notes: “The ERA failed, as Gloria [Steinem] would insist, because feminists were politically naïve, unaware of the threat of such organized forces as insurance companies, real estate lobbies, and the special interests that influenced state legislatures” (p. 373). In terms of the movement, “the defeat of the ERA acted as a brake on the energetic commitment of many feminist activists” (Ryan, 1992, p.

77). In its aftermath, feminists lacked a major organizing platform of national attention that gave their movement unity.

In the 1980s, the feminist movement continued to press for the same issues and also adopted others. Wandersee (1988) documents that, “abortion, pornography, the feminization of poverty, comparable wealth, [and] the gender gap” were important agenda items in their own right beginning in the early eighties. Steinem advocated for several of these issues. *The Washington Post* reported that Steinem “sees four enormous goals ahead: reproductive freedom, democratic families, a depoliticized culture and work redefined” (Bumiller, 1983a, p. B1). Steinem also advocated for increased women’s participation in politics and she called for more politicians to support a feminist agenda.

The personal is political

Gloria Steinem supported numerous mainstream political causes from reproductive rights to the ERA amendment. However, her feminist platform also stressed the popular feminist mantra created by feminist activist Robin Morgan – “the personal is political.” This popular phrase that came to typify second wave feminism did not connote any one issue in particular. Instead, it suggested that feminism is activated in the intimate domain of women’s lives. Farrell (1997) writes, because of this slogan “Women began to see themselves as part of a sisterhood” and women began to see that they “could fight in solidarity with one another” (p. 20). Thom (1997) also argues that the slogan both coalesces women and inspires them to act: to “forge a connection with other women” and “change the world” (p. 4).

For Steinem, the omnipresence of patriarchy is recognized first and most powerfully in our individual lives. In *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983) she writes, “the ideas of this great sea-change in women’s view of ourselves are contagious and irresistible. They hit

women like a revelation, as if we had left a dark room and walked into the sun” (p. 113). Others also suggest this slogan described Steinem’s activist style. Thom (1997) notes, “The personal is political slogan” affected feminists like Steinem. Furthermore, “the personal is political” described the tone of Steinem’s magazine, where “If Men Could Menstruate” first appeared. Thom (1997) writes, “In the letters, columns and reader forums, as in other sections of the magazine, the often repeated slogan ‘the personal is political’ became a recipe for consciousness-raising, for political organizing, and for a journalism that made a text out of the lives of the participants, editor, writer, and reader alike” (p. 205).

In addition, Steinem’s own experiences with what she perceived as evidence of patriarchy also contributed to her support of this mantra. In 1977 Gloria Steinem took a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. to “write a book on the impact of feminism on political theory” (Helibrun, 1995, p. 320). The tentative title of her book was *Feminism and Its Impact on the Premises and Goals of Current Political Theory* (Helibrun, 1995). Steinem was motivated to construct a feminist theory that “could arise from female experience” and that avoided the high academic language, which she considered exclusive and limiting (Helibrun, 1995, p. 320). Helibrun (1995) writes, “She considered that academic feminists had to write in the language of jargon that might win them advancement in their scholarly profession, but would not make their discoveries accessible to women in general” (p. 321). Thus, Steinem’s mission was to do just that: make feminism readily available to all women. In other words, Steinem sought to popularize feminism.

However, Steinem found the Woodrow Wilson Center full of “male domination” and “right wing control” and was “astonished at the lack of any interest in or attention paid to gender by the other researchers” (Helibrun, 1995, p. 326). “The hierarchical structure of the center...was

antithetical to Steinem” (Helibrun, 1995, p. 330). As a result, Steinem’s proposed book never came to fruition. As Helibrun (1995) notes, “Steinem was scarcely prepared for quite so patriarchal an institution” and “the institution was even less prepared for her” (p. 330).

Although she did not write a book in full, Steinem produced a few essays over the course of her one-year fellowship. These manuscripts were later plucked for her first book. With the help of friend and colleague Letty Pogrebin, Steinem came to realize she already had the makings of a book from years of feminist writing done over the course of her career. Thus, she drew upon “ones she considered the best candidates for an anthology,” among them “If Men Could Menstruate” (Stern, 1997, p. 333). When Steinem released *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* she ended up providing feminist theory, albeit differently than originally conceived. As Stern (1997) writes, “taken all together, the essays provide a feminist view of the world” (p. 336).

In sum, Gloria Steinem faced internal and external movement challenges. Internally, her tasks were to unify the women’s movement in light of burgeoning ideological differences among feminists and to advocate a popular feminism. With many competing voices, the second wave of feminist movement faced internal turmoil at the risk of compromising the public perception of the movement and its external agenda. Additionally, Steinem supported numerous issues comprising the movement’s agenda. Many of these items were reiterated at the National Women’s Conference in 1977 and included the Equal Rights Amendment. She was also a strong proponent of the “personal is political” slogan, which informed her activism and was inspired by events from her own life. Steinem’s internal and external movement challenges were complicated by forces of opposition that became increasingly successful by the late 1970s and into the early 1980s.

A Backlash and The Opposition

Around the same time the feminist movement faced internal and external struggles of its own, an increasingly vocal and successful antifeminist opposition emerged taking issue with the women's movement and feminists like Gloria Steinem. Opposition to the feminist movement became known by the popular phrase "backlash" and took the form of a highly organized counter-movement. In Susan Faludi's widely successful book *Backlash* (1991) she argues antifeminism first cropped up in the seventies. Similarly, Thom (1997) argues, "For feminism, the conservative backlash of the Reagan years did not wait for Ronald Reagan to enter the White House. It began sometime in 1978" (p. 146). Helibrun (1995) suggests "the first national evidence of the strength and organization of the enormous backlash to be mounted against feminism" was visibly apparent in Houston at the National Women's Conference where protestors picketed the event (p. 373). Evidence of a backlash lasted well into the eighties. Writing for the *Washington Post* in 1982, Richard Cohen put it thusly:

The bugle has sounded. The women's movement is supposedly in retreat – stung by the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, rejected by traditional women as radical and scorned by younger women as senselessly militant. Married women want to take their husbands' names and reject the use of the word Ms. and in no way want to be characterized as feminists. Women are girls once again. (p. C1)

Popular talk of a backlash had consequences for feminists who were trying to push agendas of their own. Not only did they have to worry about their platform, but now they had to qualify the legitimacy of their movement.

Backlash

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked a supposedly “post-feminist” period in American feminism. When Reagan was elected, he ushered in a wave of conservatism. Evans (2003) writes, “The Republican ascendancy led by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s endowed antifeminists like Schlafly with intellectual authority and placed people who agreed with her in major administrative posts” (p. 7). The conservative direction of the American government provided feminists with fewer political allies than they previously believed to have in a Democrat president.

The early 1980s witnessed the emergence of “post-feminism” as a word to describe the current state of the movement. Farrell (1998) writes, “by no means did the feminist movement die in the 1980s, but it changed shape, and importantly, lost its prominence in the mainstream mass media, causing many to perceive the decade as ‘post-feminist’” (p. 101). Many of the successes of the 1970s caused Americans outside the movement to believe feminism had accomplished everything it set out to do. Wandersee (1988) suggests the term post-feminism stunted a perceived need for change: “post-feminism had been snatched up by the media to characterize the ‘liberated, dress-for-success, you’ve-come-a-long-way, baby, superwoman of the 1980s’” (p. 197). The “superwoman” of the 1980s caused a decline in the support of feminism. If women were “liberated” then feminist movement was no longer necessary.

The opposition

While Gloria Steinem’s audience was a feminist one, the rise of an antifeminist opposition affected the political climate in which she worked. Therefore, it is important to understand the opposition organized against feminism and, by implication, Steinem’s agenda.

Antifeminists that organized against the women's movement consisted of a variety of conservative groups. The opposition included men and women who felt "their values and lifestyles under attack" (Chafe, 1994, p. 100). Specifically, groups organized around an anti-ERA platform. Helibrun (1995) writes, "The groups included the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, conservative religious groups, organizations like Phyllis Schlafly's Stop-ERA and Eagle Forum and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, and some business interests, particularly the insurance industry, whose rates were differentiated by sex (women live longer, so rates they paid were higher)" (p. 330). Further, specific religious groups were opposed to the ERA: "The strictly patriarchal Mormon Church was one of the amendment's leading opponents. Along with Christian fundamentalists, Orthodox Jews, and conservative Catholics, Mormons believed in rigidly separate roles for men and women and feared that the ERA would challenge male authority and upset the father's position in the family" (Stern, 1997, p. 330).

The opposition coincided with the rise of the New Right in the United States. Berkeley (1999) distinguishes the New Right or Radical Right by its interest in "halting the acceptance of key social issues – the ERA, abortion, busing, homosexuality, affirmative action" and its argument that there are essential differences between men and women (p. 87). Berkeley (1999) suggests "according to this more rigid interpretation of gender, the roles of men (husband, father, breadwinner) and women (wives, mothers, helpmeets) were divinely ordained and hierarchical with men having natural authority over women" (p. 88). The New Right argued that the ERA would not preserve traditional gender roles and thus would destroy the American family.

Further, the opposition argued that if the ERA passed women would seek employment outside of the home, women would have to register for the draft, women would have ready access to abortions, and public bathrooms would become unisex (Berkeley, 1999). At the

National Women's Conference in Houston, antifeminist protestors illustrated many of the arguments that typified the conservative right. Writing in *Newsweek* Fraker reported, "They lined the halls and carried signs saying, "ABZUG GO HOME, IWY IS ANTIGOD AND IWY IS AGAINST THE FAMILY" (1977, p. 34). Female opponents in particular "feared that without the coercion of the state, men would abandon their traditional responsibilities for the family, forcing women into 'unnatural' and unequal competition with men in the labor force" (Evans, 2003, p. 172).

The opposition that emerged vigorously around the same time "If Men Could Menstruate" was published did not deter Steinem. For example, in 1983, Steinem's essay "Far From the Opposite Shore," encouraged feminists to press on: "We are in it for life – and for our lives" (p. 362). The popular press also caught wind of Steinem's continued fervor for feminist activism. *The Washington Post* reported, "If the world has taken a half-step back, or if the movement has lost its old passion, Steinem has not" (Bumiller, 1983a, p. B1). This speaks to the fact that Steinem, like other feminists, was cognizant of the forces working against feminism. At the same time, her writing communicates that there was no "post-feminist" United States yet and the feminist movement was very much alive and well. Steinem remained committed to making the feminist movement popular, both to the women who supported it and in the larger political environment.

Analysis

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the feminist movement witnessed a world of change. Ideological incompatibility among feminists contributed to disagreements over how to advocate change on behalf of women. Disputes over how to run feminist organizations and contentions regarding feminism's priority issues came to the fore as well. In addition to these internal challenges, the second wave of feminism faced public criticism from antifeminist groups, some

of which – such as Phyllis Schlafly’s Stop-ERA movement – rallied successfully against the passage of the amendment. The rise of post-feminism served as another ideological challenge to the women’s movement, which suggested that feminism was no longer relevant or necessary. One result of a growing opposition was the realization among feminists that their goals would not be reached quickly. Evans (2003) writes, “the distance between the present and the ultimate goal sometimes seemed greater than ever” (p. 175).

Gloria Steinem was a figurehead of the feminist movement in the midst of on-the-ground organizing and ideological barriers that worked to undermine the women’s movement momentum. However, in 1978, Steinem’s one-year Woodrow Wilson fellowship offered her the opportunity to step out of the limelight and enter another phase of activism as a writer. On January 5, 1978, Steinem told the Washington Press Club, “I would like to become a writer again” (*Gloria Steinem is settling down*, p. F2). One result of Steinem’s retreat into writing was the essay “If Men Could Menstruate.”

In “If Men Could Menstruate” Steinem created non-academic feminist theory. She introduced a theory for all women by setting up a “political fantasy” in which men menstruated. Steinem proceeded inductively, showing readers what the world would look like if men menstruated instead of women. Steinem used menstruation to describe how political issues would be discussed. Her essay contained characters whose dialogue illustrated how men would talk if they menstruated. Steinem also added women to the voices in her essay by documenting how they would respond to men menstruating. Finally, Steinem’s “political fantasy” was doused in humor, which added to the female, in-group appeal of her essay.

“If Men Could Menstruate” reflects the time in which Steinem wrote in that it illustrated Steinem’s goal to reach as many women as possible through an accessible style. The fact that

Steinem's essay also embedded feminism in everyday aspects of women's lives evidenced her mission to show women that the essence of the movement could be captured in personal ways, through instances that were not overtly political and, most importantly, do not escape anyone. This speaks to the fact that Steinem aligned her rhetoric with the mantra of second wave feminism: "the personal is political." "If Men Could Menstruate" clearly was written for a feminist audience. Nevertheless, Steinem's essay addressed external influences on the feminist movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s. She included voices from the opposition such as Phyllis Schlafly and a bulk of the dialogue came from men who were adversaries of the feminist movement. Although Steinem's essay was not aimed at antifeminists, including these characters in the "political fantasy" added potency to her central thesis that gender inequity pervaded all aspects of women's lives, it thrived in the logic of oppressive groups and institutions, and finally, it began on a personal level in one's own mind that added up to the societal suppression of women.

In "If Men Could Menstruate," Steinem drew upon four rhetorical strategies that worked together to support and enact her theory. Steinem relied on 1) the topic of menstruation, 2) humor, 3) the everyday, and 4) dialogue. The topic of menstruation played the key role in terms of Steinem's strategy. It was the impetus for humor, an everyday topic and the topic of dialogue in her essay. On its own, the topic of menstruation would have been insufficient because it is potentially offensive and therefore confrontational. Moreover, it would be impossible to explicate an entire feminist agenda based on one topic without the support of other strategies. Taken all together, the topic of menstruation, humor, the everyday and dialogue enabled Steinem to reach a wide range of women and allowed her to advocate popular feminism. In this way, "If Men Could Menstruate" worked as theory for the everyday woman (and

feminist). Through presenting her ideas inductively and in a “fantasy” world, Steinem indirectly advocated a feminist agenda. Yet at the same time, her daring topic choice confronted her audience straight on.

I have selected three key passages from “If Men Could Menstruate” that highlight Steinem’s rhetorical strategy well. In the analysis that follows, Steinem’s approach is evident in all of the passages I present. While her strategy is apparent throughout, I explain it specifically in two ways. I illustrate its functionality in terms of meeting one of Steinem’s three main purposes: advocating an inclusive, broad political agenda; reclaiming popular feminism; or unifying feminists. I also underscore her strategy’s ability to reach an external or internal audience.

Reaching Women on the Fringes: Advocating a Political Agenda

In the first passage I analyze, I argue that Steinem advocated for sustained feminist action, which she warranted on the grounds that women continued to be largely invisible in public discussion. Towards this end, Steinem advocated a political agenda in two ways. First, Steinem suggested that the personal is political. Given the time in which she wrote, it is not surprising that Steinem advocated this popular mantra. However, what *is* noteworthy is how Steinem enabled readers to come to this conclusion. Second, Steinem identified the persistence of the biological rationale as a major roadblock to feminist success. These two themes outlined Steinem’s political agenda, which stressed that significant problems exist and therefore warrant continued feminist movement. Steinem’s four-part rhetorical strategy supported her approach. The topic of menstruation paved the way as a leading strategy, with humor, the everyday and dialogue playing supporting roles.

Steinem wrote,

So what would happen if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate, and women could not?

Clearly, menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event:

Men would brag about how long and how much.

Young boys would talk about it as the envied beginning of manhood. Gifts, religious ceremonies, family dinners, and stag parties would mark the day.

To prevent monthly work loss among the powerful, Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea. Doctors would research little about heart attacks, from which men were hormonally protected, but everything about cramps.

Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free. Of course, some men would still pay for the prestige of such commercial brands as Paul Newman Tampons, Muhammad Ali's Rope-a-Dope Pads, John Wayne Maxi Pads, and Joe Namath Jock Shields – 'For Those Light Bachelor Days.'

Statistical surveys would show that men did better in sports and won more Olympic medals during their periods.

Generals, rightwing politicians, and religious fundamentalists would cite menstruation ('*men*-struation') as proof that only men could serve God and country in combat ('You have to give blood to take blood'), occupy high political office ('Can women be properly fierce without a monthly cycle governed by the planet Mars?'), be priests, ministers, God Himself ('He gave this blood for our sins'), or rabbis ('Without a monthly purge of impurities, women are unclean'). (p. 367)

Steinem's political agenda was embedded in the notion that personal is political. The topic of menstruation, humor, the everyday and dialogue all played a part in conveying this popular mantra of second wave feminist activism.

The topic of menstruation anchored Steinem's argument that the personal is political. As a topic that was literally *personal*, menstruation provided the "personal" piece to "the personal is political slogan." Menstruation was personal in more than the literal sense in that it connoted a sense of intimacy on the basis of experiential knowledge. These aspects to the topic of menstruation speak to the fact that Steinem's message was crafted in the image of all women. These qualities also helped Steinem overcome the attitudinal barrier that suggested feminism belonged to white women of privilege. Menstruation precluded no one. A woman did not have to be a committed feminist, an academic feminist or otherwise to understand what the topic meant. It was contingent on experiential knowledge and nothing more. Steinem's political agenda therefore began from a premise that invited all women to be feminist.

Next, menstruation served as Steinem's point of theorizing. Menstruation worked indirectly to convey the message that by virtue of being female, women were politically disadvantaged. Steinem came to this conclusion by putting men in "women's shoes," so to speak, through the topic of menstruation. Steinem's strategy was indirect because she overtly talked about men – referencing popular figures like Paul Newman, Muhammad Ali, John Wayne and Joe Namath. However, Steinem was talking about the experience of menstruation and therefore addressing a female readership. In this way, Steinem clearly spoke to women to make the point that men arbitrarily enjoyed superior circumstances that played out politically. When she wrote, "To prevent monthly work loss among the powerful, Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea" or when she said, "Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free," she

argued that men held a societal advantage (p. 367). Characterizing men as “the powerful” and references to “Congress” as well as federal funding evidenced their political stature (p. 367). The unspoken message was that women were not afforded the same political resources or advocacy as men. Steinem’s indirect style in this case appealed to women on the fringes or women who were not committed feminists because they believed feminism was no longer necessary. By showing that the personal is political – that *their* personal is political, Steinem argued that feminism had an important stake in the lives of all women. Enacting the personal is political through the topic of menstruation allowed Steinem to do just that.

The use of humor also supported Steinem’s contention that the personal is political. In order to “get” Steinem’s humor, one would have to suspend the conventional (and patriarchal) position that there is nothing funny about menstruation and it should not be discussed publicly. Menstruation was a “women’s problem” so to speak. On the other hand, Steinem’s humor required that readers believe the personal is political. This goes against the patriarchal position that silences the topic of menstruation. Thus, readers that support the personal is political slogan understand that imposing silence on menstruation politicizes women’s lives. When Steinem joked, “Some men would still pay for the prestige of such commercial brands as Paul Newman Tampons, Muhammad Ali’s Rope-a-Dope Pads, John Wayne Maxi Pads, and Joe Namath Jock Shields” it was evident that her humor came with the prerequisite of experiential knowledge (p. 367). If one could understand that women’s experience of menstruation, compared to the one Steinem carved out in her essay, illustrated gender inequality in practice, then readers could also buy into the jokes about menstruation. Appreciating the humor in Steinem’s jokes therefore depended on one being attitudinally adjusted to the notion that the personal is political, and therefore, that women’s experiences ought to be part of the public discussion.

Steinem combined the topic of menstruation and humor with the everyday to cement her argument that the personal is political. In this passage, menstruation functioned as an instance of the everyday. For example, when Steinem wrote that, “menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event,” she illustrated the ordinary or everyday aspect to menstruation by citing what may become popular attitudes and perceptions of the experience if it were men’s (p. 367). Likewise, the idea of “gifts, religious ceremonies, family dinners, and stag parties” also connoted a sense of the everyday in that they implied expected or ordinary things any person would engage in (p. 367). Thus, Steinem bridged these everyday acts to the political, once again claiming that the personal is political.

Just like menstruation, the everyday was the means for another indirect appeal. In terms of the everyday, the implicit or unsaid idea was that the everyday, which Steinem spoke about, and the everyday, which she alluded to, yielded two very different and very gendered conclusions. The fact that the fantasy failed to coincide with reality was Steinem’s point. “Gifts” and “family dinners” in honor of one’s period would be absurd as long as we were talking about women (p. 367). When men went through the same thing, it suddenly was normal to celebrate. It became the everyday. Steinem’s strategy therefore served as a commentary on the state of gender relations, revealing fundamentally disparate experiences between the sexes. Her everyday strategy helped readers come to a political conclusion indirectly. As a topic, the everyday was not obviously political. However, by using it as the impetus for theory, Steinem politicized the everyday to reiterate her claim that the personal is political. Her strategy was agreeable with a female audience whose commitments to the movement did not run deep. Making the women’s movement contingent on the ordinary overcame feminism’s reputation as a political movement for the few. Everyday feminism applied to all women.

Finally, Steinem's use of dialogue contributed to her contention that the personal is political. While dialogue is not necessarily personal, the dialogue in Steinem's essay was in the sense that it centered on menstruation – conventionally, a personal topic. Steinem's dialogue functioned as a commentary on the antiquated distinction between public and private spheres that had long subordinated women by relegating them to the private realm. Dialogue on the topic of menstruation helped show that the personal is political and that the distinction between public and private was a way to subordinate women's political power. Steinem attempted to break that tradition by bringing dialogue on menstruation into the forefront.

Dialogue helped Steinem explain that gender continued to be used against women, but for men. The dialogue evidenced that men were talking, while women were *not*. The underlying assumption to Steinem's argument was that women's voices failed to be heard. Dialogue on menstruation suggested that the public/private dichotomy continued to persist. Towards this end, dialogue was evident at two points in the passage. When Steinem wrote that, "Men would brag about how long and how much" and "young boys would talk about it as the envied beginning of manhood," she enacted the public/private distinction, making it permissible for men to talk, even brag, about their periods (p. 367). Implicitly, she suggested that women's voices were devalued. However, by taking dialogue on menstruation into the public sphere, Steinem sought to rhetorically dismantle the public/private distinction.

The personal is political was not the only piece to Steinem's political agenda. Steinem also argued that one major barrier working against women was the biological rationale. She argued against the logic of the biological rationale by using the topic of menstruation, humor, the everyday and, dialogue.

Using the topic of menstruation, Steinem attacked the validity of the biological rationale. In order to disprove the biological rationale, Steinem put it into practice by having the men in her essay enact the argument. Her purpose was to point out that the biological rationale continued to perpetuate inequality between the sexes. Steinem argued that in practice the biological rationale did not withstand feminist objections, proving that it was a fallible argument or one of many “power justifications” used against women (p. 369).

Steinem dismantled the biological rationale in two ways. First, she activated the rationale through the topic of menstruation because menstruation is a biological process. Towards this end, Steinem attached a positive meaning to the topic of menstruation, saying it was an “enviable” and “boast-worthy” process of the body (p. 367). She explained that the act of menstruation was grounds for personal merriment and political intervention. The “stag parties” and congressionally created “National Institute of Dysmenorrhea” explicated Steinem’s point (p. 367). Second, Steinem used menstruation as “proof” of male superiority. For example, when she wrote, “Statistical surveys would show that men did better in sports and won more Olympic medals during their periods,” Steinem illustrated how biology worked as “evidence” of male superiority (p. 367). By reversing the biological rationale and using it to argue for patriarchal positions, Steinem illustrated that biology was insufficient “proof” of male superiority. Once again her method was indirect. Instead of using claims and providing evidence, Steinem allowed her readers to reach the conclusion on their own. By showing the biological rationale in practice, readers “saw” it for what it really was. Steinem’s exposé of the rationale alluded to the fact that it was not substantial “proof” of anything, let alone capable of grounding serious social differences between men and women. Illuminating the transparency of the biological position clearly documented that biology was insufficient evidence of male superiority.

Likewise, Steinem's use of humor undercut the biological rationale. Steinem's humor was aimed at an audience that believed the biological rationale was collapsible and making it the butt of jokes was therefore acceptable. This position catered to a feminist in-group of readers who were familiar with the topic of menstruation based on experiential knowledge. While her style catered to a certain constituency, Steinem also avoided the readership who would write-off her humor as inappropriate or even disgusting. Patriarchal constituencies would perceive menstruation as a female "problem," associating it with otherness or something that was shameful. In this way, Steinem created feminist humor aimed at women and also dislodged the opposing patriarchal argument. Thus, in light of her audience, Steinem proceeded to undercut the rationale through humor. Steinem rejected the idea that biology was akin to natural law or that it was somehow the determinant of essential social differences between men and women. Her use of humor showed that the biological rationale was not a rigid construct. For example she wrote, "Liberal males in every field would try to be kind to women. The fact that 'these people' have no gift for measuring life, the liberals would explain, should be punishment enough" (p. 368). Also, scenarios in which "street guys would invent slang" about menstruation or when "menopause would be celebrated as a positive event, the symbol that men had accumulated enough years of cyclical wisdom to need no more" were indicative of the fact that biology had no connection to the social privilege of one sex over the other (p. 368). Laughing at the notion of male superiority put a gaping hole in the biological rationale, suggesting that it was neither logical nor incapable of destruction. Violating the reality structure in this way forced women to rethink norms that they ordinarily would take for granted.

The element of the everyday added another layer of support towards challenging the acceptability of the biological rationale. Steinem took everyday scenarios and showed their

relationship to the biological rationale. Bridging the everyday and the biological rationale illuminated that the ordinary or the everyday was not “natural.” Steinem cited everyday attitudes that were shaped by acceptance of the biological rationale. Towards this end, she suggested popular attitudes asked, “Can women be properly fierce without a monthly cycle governed by the planet Mars?” or stated, “Without a monthly purge of impurities, women are unclean” (p. 367). The obvious absurdity of these attitudes to the feminist reader helped Steinem counter the oppressive logic, making the opposition’s position look undeniably weak. Her everyday examples rendered the conclusion that perceiving women in this patriarchal mindset was a concerted societal effort. There was nothing “natural” or everyday about it and therefore such attitudes should be eliminated.

Lastly, dialogue in Steinem’s passage helped identify the persistence of the biological rationale. Steinem used dialogue on the topic of menstruation that often enacted the biological rationale. Her purpose was to show the sexist nature to the position and therefore undercut its agency. In this way, she made the biological rationale and those who supported it accountable for the “logic” of the position by directly confronting it. Steinem criticized adversaries of the feminist movement who were guilty of subscribing to the biological logic. They were “Generals, rightwing politicians, and religious fundamentalists [who] would cite menstruation...as proof that only men could serve God and country in combat...occupy high political office...be priests, ministers, God Himself...or rabbis” (p. 367). She argued that the biological rationale limited women’s entry into positions of power and advancement and was embedded in the way those in power talked about women. To the feminist reader though, Steinem’s dialogue was a challenge to the sexist language and therefore challenged everyday beliefs that were articulated on biological grounds. Steinem showed it was fallible and that talking in the language of the

biological rationale was downright sexist. Her method therefore undermined the authority of the biological rationale.

Steinem's political agenda consisted of arguing that the personal is political and was also contingent on refuting the biological rationale. These aspects to "If Men Could Menstruate" appealed to female readers, including women who were potentially feminist. In order to continue to reach women whose commitment to the movement was at best tenable, Steinem sought to reclaim popular feminism.

Reclaiming Popular Feminism

In the second passage I analyze, I argue that Steinem's rhetoric functioned to reclaim popular feminism. This enabled Steinem to reach an external audience composed of women who were not committed feminists and therefore lacked an affinity for the feminist movement. Steinem popularized feminism by embedding it within popular culture and everyday or ordinary acts. She combined this approach with the topic of menstruation, humor and dialogue.

Steinem's approach worked on two levels. First, it functioned as an alternative version of feminism. Steinem's strategy appealed to women who were not devout feminists by communicating feminism in the language of popular culture while still reaching a political end. Steinem's alternative version of feminism removed feminism from the high language of academia or the more stringent and radical methods of some feminists. The backdrop of popular culture showed the pervasiveness of gender inequity in terms that a broad constituency could conceptualize without being imposing or without requiring any particular expertise. Second, Steinem's approach conveyed that antifeminism had become socially ossified. Her rhetoric tried to dislodge the view that gender inequity was "natural." Taken together, these functions reclaimed popular feminism by translating the movement into a common cause opposed to an

ingrained social issue. Thus, Steinem relied on an accessible style that was indirectly political in order to ground her arguments. In the following passage, the two main functions of Steinem's rhetoric were compatible with an audience external to the feminist movement. Specifically, Steinem's message resonated with women who were turned off by a strictly political understanding of feminism or women who saw their relationship to feminism as inconsequential. Instead of being obviously political, Steinem's approach was "softer" in that she lured female readers in by showing them how feminism resonated with women who may not pay attention to politics. Thus, rather than requiring that women have specialized knowledge about the movement, Steinem brought feminism to the readers by explaining it in ordinary contexts and circumstances, like television. Feminism on Steinem's terms therefore offered the opportunity to see the movement from a different perspective.

Steinem wrote, if men could menstruate,

Street guys would invent slang ('He's a three-pad man') and 'give fives' on the corner with some exchange like, 'Man, you lookin' *good!*'

'Yeah, man, I'm on the rag!'

TV shows would treat the subject openly. (*Happy Days*: Richie and Potsie try to convince Fonzie that he is still 'The Fonz,' though he has missed two periods in a row. *Hill Street Blues*: The whole precinct hits the same cycle). So would newspapers. (SUMMER SHARK SCARE THREATENS MENSTRUATING MEN. JUDGE CITES MONTHLIES IN PARDONING RAPIST).

And so would movies. (Newman and Redford in *Blood Brothers!*).

Men could convince women that sex was *more* pleasurable at 'that time of the month.'

Lesbians would be said to fear blood and therefore life itself, though all they needed was

a good menstruating man. Medical schools would limit women's entry ('they might faint at the sight of blood.')

 (pp. 367-368)

This passage demonstrates Steinem's goal to reclaim popular feminism and reach women who may be skeptical of or indifferent towards feminism. In order to make a populist push for feminism, Steinem combined popular culture or the everyday with the topic of menstruation, humor and dialogue.

First, popular culture played an integral role in this passage. Steinem used popular culture in order to provide an alternative version of feminism, which suggested that the movement needed to press on as its goals had yet to be achieved. She argued that feminism continued to be socially relevant, even though adversaries had written off the movement as passé. References to popular culture were peppered throughout this passage. When Steinem referred to *Happy Days*, *Hill Street Blues*, (Paul) Newman and (Robert) Redford, she drew upon popular television programs and Hollywood movie stars of the day. Then Steinem tied these examples of popular culture to a feminist agenda by making a political argument that bridged the two. Steinem indirectly claimed that a feminist agenda was not *on the agenda*, though it should be. Movies such as *Blood Brothers* or plot lines on *Happy Days* showed that men took center stage (p. 368). Another use of popular culture – this time, through newspapers – also helped to convey Steinem's point. Newspaper headlines such as, "SUMMER SHARK SCARE THREATENS MENSTRUATING MEN," conveyed that on a day-to-day level women's issues were not discussed (p. 368). Instead, men made front-page news. Steinem's approach was indirect in order to appeal to women that did not see how gender inequity affected them specifically. By framing the problem in terms one could "see," whether it was in print or on the small or big screen, Steinem illustrated that feminism was more than stereotypical activism. She argued that while feminism

was certainly political in a traditional sense, it was also political in that it amounted to how women were *not* seen or treated. Essentially, it had become “normal” to perceive women in this way. Thus, Steinem argued that feminism was necessary more than ever because sexism had become normalized.

Next, Steinem’s use of dialogue supported her alternative version of feminism. She claimed that feminism was a social imperative in light of the fact that gender inequity had become socially entrenched. Steinem demonstrated this in two ways. First, by using dialogue Steinem illustrated that we were not talking about women with the same fervor as the other half of the population. Towards this end, she contrasted a male point-of-view to a woman’s (implicit) point-of-view. “Slang” like “He’s a three-pad man” and exchanges such as “Man, you lookin’ good!” “Yeah, man, I’m on the rag” portrayed men’s dialogue as direct and public (pp. 367-368). Implicitly, Steinem’s characterization of men’s dialogue showed what women’s was *not* by comparison. This forced the conclusion that women were not part of the public dialogue. The absence of women contributed to Steinem’s contention that inequity was pervasive and virtually erased women from public dialogue. Second, Steinem argued that inequity was apparent because sexist dialogue had become socially acceptable. She used everyday dialogue to evidence the codification of gender inequity in society. When Steinem wrote that “Men would convince women that sex was *more* pleasurable at ‘that time of the month’” and “Lesbians would be said to fear blood and therefore life itself, though all they needed was a good menstruating man,” she alluded to commonly held beliefs that were clearly driven by sexism (p. 368). The assumptions Steinem brought to the fore illustrated the sort of sexist thinking that treated women as sexual objects. Solutions to “women’s problems” in the form of “a good menstruating man” reflected the larger societal consensus that women’s issues were somehow less serious than the problems

men encountered. Moreover, the talk Steinem used evoked a sense of the everyday, the sort of thing said in the neighborhood bar or between friends. Steinem showed that gender inequity evolved to a point where it became socially expected and, therefore, that sexism was part of our “natural” dialogue.

Steinem supported her alternative version of feminism with the topic of menstruation to further convey the social entrenchment of gender inequity. As an easily identifiable experience, menstruation summoned women to make a connection to their own lives. Steinem continued with her alternative interpretation of feminism by writing about television shows with a menstruation plot-twist. For example, on *Hill Street Blues*, “The whole precinct hits the same cycle” or on *Happy Days*, Fonzie “missed two periods in a row” (p. 368). Her examples were purposively odd to illustrate the contingency of “normal.” They spoke volumes: if men menstruated, it would be considered so normal that it would appear on television. But since women menstruate, that same plotline would be unthinkable. Steinem’s use of menstruation suggested that broadly speaking women were considered marginally and negatively. Thus, while her method was by no means a straightforward example of feminist activism, it pointed to the same idea that women’s rights ought to be an imperative social issue. Using an indirect method was rhetorically savvy on Steinem’s part because it worked against the attitudinal barrier that suggested feminism was no longer relevant. In illustrating the nature and extent of the biological rationale, Steinem showed that a major problem still persisted. Therefore, indirectly advocating feminism molded a strong female audience for Steinem and introduced potentially new supporters of the women’s movement when framed in subtly political terms.

The unusual style that Steinem adopted worked in this instance as well because of humor, which grounded her alternative version of feminism. Steinem’s humor was apparent in her

discussion of popular culture. Scenarios where “Ritchie and Potsie try to convince Fonzie that he is still ‘The Fonz,’ though he has missed two periods in a row” and “The whole precinct hits the same cycle” were humorous, but only for women who endorsed “the personal is political” slogan (p. 368). To them, the humor was funny because it was counterintuitive to the way menstruation was usually treated. Steinem violated expectations regarding how the topic was normally perceived in order to show the sexist treatment of women. In this way, her jokes entailed a political function by illuminating how women’s issues were *not* played out in popular culture (and how men’s *were*). Making menstruation a male function showed that men were privileged over women. Getting Steinem’s humor, and therefore her point, depended on readers endorsing “the personal is political” slogan. The laughter that could be extracted from Steinem’s jokes was ultimately funny because of this theoretical hook. Steinem’s humor went against the post-feminist mindset that said women had achieved equality and therefore feminism was over. A post-feminist perspective would suggest that “activist humor” was not necessary as gender equality already existed. Moreover, women who continued to perceive menstruation as a “private” issue would not make the ideological commitment that stressed “the personal is political.” In other words, joking about menstruation would be inappropriate given that it was “not talked about.” This speaks to the fact that Steinem addressed women who were committed feminists or women who had the potential to believe in feminist advocacy. If readers did not see the humor in Steinem’s essay, then they did not belong to either of these constituencies.

Steinem’s alternative philosophy of feminism relied on atypical strategies of feminist rhetoric. Her use of popular culture, the topic of menstruation dialogue and humor combined to support her theory. Together, they amounted to illustrating the pervasive nature of gender inequity. Steinem reached that conclusion through an indirect style, which provided the

advantage of speaking to a specific pocket of women and the opportunity to formulate feminism differently. In order to extend the argument that gender inequity was deeply embedded in societal institutions, political systems and personal mindsets, she demonstrated that gender inequity had become acceptable or merely ordinary. It was a serious problem that affected all women, Steinem suggested. The approach Steinem adopted had the ability to reach an external audience because it avoided the expected feminist claims in favor of an accessible style that was indirectly political. In this way, her rhetoric avoided resemblance to academic feminism or any other type of feminism whether it be of the radical, cultural or Marxist persuasion. Her approachable mode of theorizing invited all women to consider feminism in terms of the everyday. Thus, in this passage, Steinem's message expanded a feminist audience to include all women. Steinem did not simply preach to the converted. In taking feminism out of its home in the political realm and into popular culture and the everyday, Steinem offered an alternative version of feminism. Yet, Steinem's goal continued to be consonant with the women's movement. Her strategy provided the same conclusion that a feminist agenda was not taken seriously, that women remained unheard and, most importantly, that the personal is political.

Unifying Feminists

Steinem's rhetoric was equally suited for committed feminists. As a transformational leader of second wave feminism, it is reasonable to suggest that Steinem's message would resonate with some feminists. However, that was the easy part. Steinem faced the daunting task of getting women on the same playing field, so to speak, in light of ideological clashes. Unifying the movement was an imperative for sustained momentum from within the movement and for the purposes of maintaining political legitimacy in the public sphere.

In the following analysis I explain how Steinem's rhetoric unified feminists. Given the fact that the feminist movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s struggled over competing ideological and rhetorical agendas and faced the prospect of being eroded by antifeminists, Steinem had to unify women within the movement, ensuring intra-sisterhood compatibility and a united front for the general public. Steinem capitalized on the topic of menstruation, humor and dialogue to reach her goal. She problematized the way feminists thought, talked and organized in order to argue that ideological differences among women were counter-productive and unnecessary.

Steinem asked, if men could menstruate,

How would women be trained to react?

One can imagine right-wing women agreeing to all these arguments with a stanch and smiling masochism. ('The ERA would force housewives to wound themselves every month': Phyllis Schlafly. 'Your husband's blood is as sacred as that of Jesus – and so sexy, too!': Marabel Morgan). Reformers and Queen Bees would adjust their lives to the cycles of the men around them. Feminists would explain endlessly that men, too, needed to be liberated from the false idea of Martian aggressiveness, just as women needed to escape the bonds of 'menses-envy.' Radical feminists would add that the oppression of the nonmenstrual was the pattern for all other oppressions. ('Vampires were our first freedom fighters!') Cultural feminists would exalt a bloodless female imagery in art and literature. Socialist feminists would insist that, once capitalism and imperialism were overthrown, women would menstruate, too. ('If women aren't yet menstruating in Russia,' they would explain, 'it's only because true socialism can't exist within capitalist encirclement.'). (pp. 368-369)

In this passage, Steinem advocated unification among feminists. She drew upon a combination of the topic of menstruation, humor and dialogue to make the argument that feminist unification was not just important; it was necessary if feminism was to succeed in the long run. Steinem's critique of feminist communication showed women across the ideological spectrum that they were more similar than they thought. Moreover, her criticism of the antifeminist position showed women what they were up against and what they were beginning to sound like. In this way, she avoided the straightforward argument that feminists should unify, privileging an indirect style instead. Steinem's indirect appeal helped her reach feminists without being off-putting or potentially offensive and therefore turning readers away. She was neither stringent nor harsh. By subtly leading readers to the conclusion that they should change their own attitudes, Steinem called for action without being overly pushy. She argued feminists should unify by way of her three-fold strategy.

First, using the topic of menstruation, Steinem unified feminists by showing them that they operated from a common premise. By using a topic that implied sameness, Steinem's menstruation theme reminded women that they were grounded in the same oppression. Thus, even if women's ideologies were different, they shared a biological experience that bound them together. Her method therefore implied a sense of unification, by anchoring feminists in the universally shared problem of gender inequity. She mentioned "Reformers," "Queen Bees," "Feminists," "Radical feminists," "Cultural feminists" and "Socialist feminists," conceding that as feminists they have disparate names (pp. 368-369). Yet, she reminded female readers that their common experience with menstruation put them in analogous circumstances. According to Steinem, menstruation was more than biology; it conveyed a shared feminist agenda. In this way, she used menstruation to argue that feminists should fight gender oppression together.

Next, through the use of humor, Steinem suggested that their positions were only arbitrarily different. When Steinem wrote that “women needed to escape the bonds of ‘menses-envy’” or when she cited radical feminists’ proclamation, “‘Vampires were our first freedom fighters,’” her humor was evident (p. 369). Again, when she suggested that cultural feminists “would exalt a bloodless female imagery in art” and socialist feminists “would insist that, once capitalism and imperialism were overthrown women would menstruate, too,” Steinem used humor (p. 369). “Getting” Steinem’s humor was based on a feminist in-group of readers that took a liberal rather than radical approach. Steinem essentially stripped away the seriousness that women attached to their feminist identities, suggesting that what they had in common as women was more important and essential to achieving equality. Her humor was also based on “mainstream” themes, such as popular television programs, which speaks to the fact that it was meant for liberal rather radical feminists, the latter of whom emphasized being on society’s fringes. Moreover, Steinem’s humor often weighed men’s lives against the implicit experience of women, with a persuasive subtext that argued women were entitled to the same rights as men. These themes clearly resonate with liberal feminists who sought a place in society that incorporated women on an equal footing with men. Radicals, on the other hand, perceived society as fundamentally flawed and therefore wanted no part in the “mainstream.” In this way, Steinem’s humor could be perceived as trivializing to them. Thus, for liberal-minded feminists driven to achieve equality with men, Steinem argued that what they shared together was more powerful than what separated them. She conveyed that feminists should not be taking their own differences *so* seriously given that their platforms were each bound by the same problem.

Steinem’s use of dialogue drove her point home by enacting the various positions of feminists. Her criticism of the way feminists talked addressed ideological tensions. Steinem put

their positions into practice when she described how “women would be trained to react” and spelled out several standpoints from liberal to radical feminism and everything in between (p. 368). For example, when she wrote that, “radical feminists would add that the oppression of the nonmenstrual was the pattern for all other oppressions,” and “Reformers and Queen Bees would adjust their lives to the cycles of the men around them,” she illustrated the reformist versus radical split (pp. 367-368). After Steinem illustrated different feminist positions, she argued for unification in an indirect manner. She found that all their positions shared the stumbling block of being tied to oppressive logic. Evidence for this claim was in *their talk*. By showing feminists how their talk looked in practice, Steinem suggested that their positions were no better than men’s if they were outgrowths of the oppressive thinking. Her tactic was more powerful than direct address. If Steinem had stated her claim outright, the argument could have been off-putting, offensive or it could have been perceived as scolding women into changing. However, the indirect means of her argument put the onus on women, suggesting that they change given the warning Steinem has served them. Steinem’s use of dialogue therefore oriented women to revisit their own logic.

Finally, Steinem critiqued the talk of antifeminists as well. She used two well-known antifeminists of the day, Phyllis Schlafly and Marabel Morgan, as examples. Steinem exemplified their positions when she wrote, “‘The ERA would force housewives to wound themselves every month: Phyllis Schlafly.’ ‘Your husband’s blood is as sacred as that of Jesus – and so sexy, too!’: Marabel Morgan” (p. 367). These examples showed that the antifeminist position unraveled in practice and was supported by faulty reasoning. Steinem’s critique of antifeminists was nevertheless aimed at a feminist audience. It deepened her warning to feminists that they needed to be mindful of how they advocated their agenda, as it was similar to the

oppressive logic that antifeminists like Schlafly and Morgan clearly subscribed to. Evidence for Steinem's argument is provided in the sense that their positions were all regarding "menstruation," which in the "political fantasy" was the property of patriarchy. Steinem's use of the antifeminist logic therefore amounted to saying that women were playing into men's hands, instead of breaking from their standpoint in favor of a unified platform.

In this passage, Steinem's use of the topic of menstruation, humor and dialogue worked to unify feminists. She began from a premise that implied sameness. Menstruation invoked a common experience. Moreover, Steinem's humor also conveyed a shared knowledge about menstruation, but more importantly, about being feminist. Then, Steinem moved beyond implication, showing women how they were the same. Steinem's dialogue performed this job. The talk interjected throughout the passage pointed to the fact that feminist positions were minutely different. Further, the enactment of their position(s) allowed feminists to stand back and see them for what they were. By "exposing" their standpoints in this way, Steinem motivated feminists to work together rather than against one another. After all, their differences, as she showed, were inconsequential. Steinem created a sisterhood by transcending ideological differences in favor of a common cause.

Conclusion

The combination of the topic of menstruation, humor, dialogue and the everyday weaved throughout "If Men Could Menstruate" supported Steinem's theory. Ten years into the second wave of feminism, Steinem faced the daunting task of fashioning feminism in a way that appealed broadly to a range of women, despite turmoil within the movement and a mounting opposition. The unusual approach that Steinem relied on enabled her to overcome the ideological and circumstantial barriers she faced.

The topic of menstruation spoke directly to women. Steinem's theory was made by a woman for a woman. Moreover, it implicitly spoke to an experiential knowledge that only a woman could understand. This echoed Steinem's effort to unify her audience by establishing a sense of sameness. Steinem's use of humor had a similar of advantage because the butts of some of Steinem's jokes were appreciated by a feminist in-group. Likewise, humor permitted Steinem to critique women but not at the expense of lost support. Thus, humor also contributed to a sense of feminist community in "If Men Could Menstruate." The inclusion of dialogue put arguments both for and against feminism into practice. By spelling out the antifeminist argument, Steinem directly illustrated shortcomings to the position, especially the biological rationale. Dialogue also offered the advantage of allowing feminists to "see" their own rhetorical shortcomings. It was illuminating in and of itself and for the purposes of unifying women. Finally, the inclusion of the everyday enabled Steinem to reach a non-academic feminist audience, including women who were not committed to the movement. The everyday provided an alternative lens from which to theorize that was especially attractive to would-be feminists. While on their own these strategies are odd, collectively they helped Steinem make feminism resonate with a female audience to advocate a political agenda, reclaim popular feminism and unify feminists.

Chapter 3

The Rhetoric of Feminist Unification: Steinem's "What If Freud Were Phyllis?"

Introduction

Gloria Steinem is well known as a second wave feminist activist, organizer and writer. Her contribution to the women's movement is deeply influential, enduring beyond the 1970s. Even late in the twentieth century, in the third wave of feminist activism, Steinem remained not only celebrated but also relevant by bridging the divide between women's historical legacy and contemporary activism. Writing for *The St. Petersburg Times* in 1992, Infusino noted that Steinem "is still an accurate barometer of feminism, in that feminism is not an event frozen in the experience and rhetoric of the 70s, but a process that unfolds, changes and develops" (p. 6D). Jardine (1994) also recognized that Steinem's writing continues to be up to speed with the current feminist movement: "[Steinem] has provided us with a legacy of bitingly funny, endlessly readable pieces which challenge conventional views on women's place in society in so lastingly relevant a way that many of them have been reprinted" (p. 1). Finally, writing for *The USA Today* in 1992, Donahue lauded Steinem for "changing the role of women in our society forever" and for keeping the movement "afloat" (p. 1D). Praise for Steinem speaks to the fact that not only did she have an influence on feminism of the second wave but that she is perceived as a key feminist player nearly twenty-five years after her introduction to the movement.

In 1994, Steinem drew upon her 1970s legacy for a modern take on feminist theorizing when she wrote the essay titled "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" for her book *Moving Beyond Words*. "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" was inspired by Steinem's essay "If Men Could Menstruate," which she originally wrote for *Ms.* in 1978 and reprinted in 1983 when she published her first book *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. In "What If Freud Were

Phyllis?” Steinem relied on her mainstay technique of using role reversal. However, this time, instead of describing the world as if men menstruated, Steinem chronicled the life of Sigmund Freud as if he were a woman named Phyllis Freud. As Toynbee (1994) explained, “With her invention of Dr. Phyllis Freud she [Steinem] gives us all Sigmund’s theories and dicta but sexually reversed” (p. 1).

In “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Steinem argued that gender inequity was still present in contemporary society. While her approach was unusual, “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” received ample praise for its style and message. Steinem’s essay was described as “the best she has ever written” and as “remarkable...a tour de force that takes breath away” (Billen, 1994, p. 14; Toynbee, 1994, p. 1). Limerick (1994) found, “More than any other brief text I have read, this essay simply revokes, cancels and terminates the reader’s ability to take gender inequity for granted” (p. X1). Steinem’s essay received positive reactions, suggesting that even in the 1990s her feminist message continued to resonate and that there remained an audience for it.

In this chapter I argue that Steinem’s “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” functions as a unifying feminist text that bridges second wave feminists and contemporary activists. Positioning her essay as feminist theory and a guide to modern day feminist activism, Steinem emphasizes the root problems of gender inequity in the early 1990s and, unlike “If Men Could Menstruate,” she provides rhetorical and substantive organizing solutions for continued feminist activism at the approach of a new millennium. By relying on 1) the topic of Freudian thinking, 2) humor, and 3) an academic style, Steinem appealed to women across the generational divide, attacking foundational problems of sexism and suggesting shared solutions. First, I outline the historical context in which Steinem crafted her argument. Second, I analyze Steinem’s essay in light of the historical context.

Women, Feminism and the Early 1990s

When Gloria Steinem published *Moving Beyond Words* in 1994 she was still actively involved in the feminist movement. Despite the fact that the movement had changed – both in terms of its substantive issues and its rhetorical agenda – Steinem was committed to the advancement of women. Similar to her perception of the movement in the late 1970s, she believed that even though women had made great strides, there was more work to be done. In 1992, Steinem expressed both of these positions, saying: “I feel very positive about the movement...No matter what community you go to, there’s a rape crisis hotline, a battered women’s shelter, a women’s law firm, an enormous amount of activity” (as cited in White, p. D1). But at the same, she warned that continued success “literally depends on what we do every day” (as cited in White, 1992, p. D1). Steinem’s belief that contemporary activism was necessary was also evident when she appeared on CNN on July 28, 1992, deemed the “Year of the Woman” after a record number of women were elected to the United States House of Representatives and the Senate, sharply declaring that, “It’s not the ‘year of the woman’” (as cited in Kelley, p. 1).

Steinem’s position that the women’s movement required further organized efforts was not unique to her. In the 1990s, feminism was alive and well. However, as in years past, arguments that suggested feminism was “dead” or that the movement was a social evil also persisted. Thus, the women’s movement continued alongside popular sentiment that found feminism was outdated and was continuing to experience a “backlash.”

One thing was clear by the 1990s: feminism was more complex than ever. In *The Washington Post*, Rosenfeld (1994) wrote,

These are confusing times for your ordinary gal feminist. The world is disconcertingly full of lesbian comedians, women running with wolves, feminist pornographers, anti-pornography law professors, Supreme Court justices with three names, radical Catholic feminists, penis amputators, women playing football, adult male babysitters, politically correct coeds, feminist performance artists, women who love men who hate women, and everyone going through menopause. Are you an ecofeminist? A gender feminist? A classical feminist? (p. C1)

Duffy (1993) in *Time* magazine also picked up on the intricate nature of the movement:

For the past decade or so, feminism has been taking a beating. Too extreme, according to critics of both sexes. Too splintered. Too lesbian. Too blinkered to recognize that most of the important goals have already been achieved. In addition, the movement's pioneers have distrusted younger feminists, accusing them of taking for granted gains that the older generation fought hard for. (p. 1)

Though sarcastic, these pieces reflect the larger sentiment that feminism in the 1990s was no longer the second wave version of itself. This was due in large part to the success of the last twenty-five years of feminist activism. The efforts of feminists in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in great changes for women and made it clear "that women mattered" (Rosen, 2000, p. 344).

The status of women in the 1990s

The advances women made by the 1990s are astounding and can be evidenced in many ways. Keetley and Pettegrew (1997) suggest that generally "women have...made vast inroads into previously all-male bastions: politics, academia, medicine, the law, corporate America, and professional and collegiate athletics" (p. 438). In the workplace, women experienced great change. Chafe (1994) writes that by the mid-1990s, the typical woman worker "was married and

middle-aged, and her job was indispensable for her family to claim middle-class status” (p. 131). Moreover, while women had not entirely cracked the “glass ceiling,” by 1990,

Women account for 24 percent of lawyers and judges nationwide, compared to 5 percent in 1970; they make up almost 21 percent of physicians, compared to 9 percent in 1970; almost 53 percent of accountants and auditors, compared to 25 percent in 1970; and 40 percent of college and university professors. (Berkeley, 1999, p. 105)

Politically speaking, women became more active in the early 1990s. This was particularly evident on a local level, suggests Chafe (2000), where women’s “gains were far more substantial” than compared to national politics (p. 584). On the national stage, female candidates for the House of Representatives and the Senate increased. For example, in 1992, twenty-two women ran for the Senate, and only two years previously, just eight women put their name in the ring. As Evans (2003) described, “suddenly the choices shifted from finding women to run to choosing between more than one feminist candidate” (pp. 226-227). If women weren’t running for office, they were increasingly becoming more involved by supporting candidates and participating in different ways. For example, “grassroots support for women candidates doubled and tripled. Contributions to the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Women’s Campaign Fund, and Emily’s List grew exponentially” (Evans, 2003, p. 227). Women as a voting block were also taken more seriously. Chafe (2000) notes that “continued awareness of a ‘gender gap’ in voting...kept politicians from neglecting women’s civic presence” (p. 585). Moreover, the early 1990s witnessed the advancement of women in the law. In 1993, “President Bill Clinton signed off on the Family and Medical Leave Act” and “The 103rd Congress passed thirty-three bills for women’s rights” (Kimball, 2005, p. xix). Culturally women experienced major changes. By the 1990s,

Everyday life had changed in small but significant ways. Strangers addressed a woman as Ms.; meteorologists named hurricanes after both men and women; schoolchildren learned about sexism before they became teenagers; language became more gender-neutral; [and] popular culture saturated society with comedies, thrillers, and mysteries that turned on changing gender roles. (Rosen, 2000, p. 338)

The success of the second wave of feminism is undeniable. Due in large part to the women's movement, "the assumption that women and men should be treated as equals had become a part of the American Creed" (Chafe, 1994, p. 131).

Feminism in the early 1990s

The advancement of women did not deter the contemporary feminist movement from continuing its agenda. In the early 1990s, the women's movement pressed on, suggesting that gender equality had yet to be fully achieved. Activism was an extension of the second wave and also marked a new period known as third wave feminism. A rationale for the continuance of the feminist movement contended that women "remained the primary victims of economic, social, and political inequality" in modern society, and therefore, feminist activism was both warranted as well as necessary (Chafe, 1994, p. 131). Thus, "the remobilization of women in the 1990s occurred...driven by the persistence of change and the normalization of perceptions once seen as extreme" (Evans, 2003, p. 225).

In the 1990s, women mobilized around several issues as in the past but with a particular emphasis on the diversity of women within the movement. Thus, "a major task for the women's movement in the 1990s was the continuing challenge to societal practices of exclusion and hierarchy based on gender as well as those based on other social group characteristics embedded in women's lives" (Ryan, 1992, p. 154). In addition, the "unfinished business" of the second

wave of feminism influenced the agenda of feminism in the early 1990s. Rosen (2000) argues that second wavers “were unable to change most institutions, to gain greater economic justice for poor women, or to convince society that child care is the responsibility of the whole society” (p. 344). The popular second wave mantra, “the personal is political,” carried over to the early 1990s as well. Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) write, “this engagement with personal and political transformation remains the core of both waves of feminism” (p. 19). For example, Anita Hill’s 1991 testimony at the confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas demonstrated the relevancy of “the personal is political” slogan in contemporary times. “Hill’s tale of being subjected to crass sexual overtures from her boss galvanized thousands of women in 1991, many of whom began to come forward with their own stories of egregious behavior from their employers” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 21). There were also distinctly contemporary issues of feminist activism in the 1990s. This was due in part to second wave victories that allowed for an evolved agenda with more nuanced attention to certain areas of women’s lives. Thus, in a contemporary setting, women advocated a new set of issues. Such agenda items included:

A national system of health care insurance, equalizing pension coverage, flexible work schedules, a more assertive corporate culture that actively discourages sexual harassment, counseling and training programs that move women into technical and nontraditional jobs, public education reforms that enlarge the range of vocational choices available to women, legislative efforts that focus on comparable worth...and child care. (Berkeley, 1999, p. 107)

Baumgardner and Richards (2000) add to this list suggesting that, “prominent Third Wave issues include equal access to the Internet and technology, HIV/AIDS awareness, child sexual abuse, self-mutilation, globalization, eating disorders, and body image” (p. 21). In the early 1990s,

issues related to women's bodies and female sexuality were very much at the forefront of the feminist agenda. For example, "feminist activism...was especially visible around the issue of reproductive choice and violence against women" (Evans, 2003, p. 222). Abortion too especially coalesced women. As Evans (2003) suggests, "the attack on abortion rights energized young women" (p. 225). Finally, one issue that was noticeably not on the table in the early 1990s was the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Chafe (2000) documents that "despite early success in securing support in state legislatures...backers of the Equal Rights Amendment discovered that there was no chance of persuading three-fourths of the states to ratify it" (p. 584).

Given the plethora of issues that feminism in the early 1990s tackled, it is not surprising that activism continued on a large scale. As Thom (1997) notes, "the early nineties was a time of new energy for feminism" (p. 229). Despite going advertisement-free beginning in 1990, *Ms.* magazine reached some of its best circulation numbers in the early 1990s, peaking at a readership of 300,000 "under Robin Morgan's editorship from 1989-1993" (Kimball, 2005, p. xviii). In 1992, "more than 750,000 joined National Organization for Women's (NOW) march for reproductive rights, which was, to that point, the largest ever demonstration in Washington, D.C." (Thom, 1997, p. 229). Feminist organizations also remained part of the movement as in years past but with some changes. Whittier (1995) writes that, "the early 1990s were a time of flux for most of the organizations that survived or grew out of those founded in the 1970s" (p. 229). For example, "organizations became institutionalized" and "alliances with other social movements grew" (Whittier, 1995, p. 229). Also, many radical organizations that thrived in the 1970s had disbanded by the 1990s. Writing for *The Boston Globe* in 1994, Flint reported that "a growing number of women in academic, legal, and political circles have been banding together in a bid to reclaim the mantle of feminism from what they call a radical faction, one that no

longer speaks for women” (p. 1). The endurance of NOW, the quintessential representation of “the equal rights branch of feminism,” speaks to the fact that the radicalism of earlier feminist groups no longer remained relevant to society, at least not in the mainstream (Berkeley, 1999, p. 102).

Third wave feminism

Even though many of the issues driving feminism in the early 1990s coincided with the second wave, there was a new form of activism developing known as third wave feminism. Third wave feminism emerged as a response to the notion that the United States was in a post-feminist era. In 1992, feminist writer and activist Rebecca Walker coined the term “third wave” in her essay “Becoming the Third Wave,” which appeared in *Ms.* magazine (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003). Walker (1992) proudly proclaimed, “I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave” (p. 41). The complexity of the third wave is obvious in that there is no one definition. Heywood and Drake (2003) write,

We define feminism’s third wave as a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures. (p. 3)

On the other hand, Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) define the third wave as,

A younger generation’s feminism, one that rejects traditional – or stereotypical – understandings of feminism and as such is antithetical or oppositional to its supposed predecessor, the second wave. The feminism we claim, however, aligns itself with second wave strategies for recognizing and addressing structural inequalities. (p. 5)

The third wave of activism is geared towards younger women. Evans (2003) pinpoints women “born between 1965 and 1974” as third wave feminists (p. 230). They are “contemporary

Alice Pauls,” as Baumgardner and Richards (2000) suggest (p. 77). By birth, feminists of the third wave are afforded rights that their second wave predecessors fought for and could not even conceive of as young women. As a result, their orientation to the movement is markedly different, often overlooking the efforts of those who came before them. Writing on behalf of the third wave, Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) acknowledge that, “We experience hard-fought feminist gains as fundamental rights, without recognizing the efforts that went into securing those rights” (p. 11). Baumgardner and Richards (2000) describe this inheritance similarly, referring to the efforts of second wave feminists as, “products of culture [that] are mundane to us, simply the atmosphere in our temporal tank” (p. 192). Thus, third wave activism maintains an inevitable relationship to second wave feminism but, at the same time, its supporters make a concerted effort to carve out their own identity. As Baumgardner and Richards (2000) declare, “We’re not doing feminism the same way that the seventies feminists did it; being liberated doesn’t mean copying what came before but finding one’s own way – a way that is genuine to one’s own generation” (p. 130).

While the third wave of feminism has not “coalesced into a larger, easily definable movement,” it subscribes to three core beliefs (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 11). First, intersectionality is definitive of the third wave of feminism. Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) suggest that this notion emerged in the 1970s when “U.S. women of color and lesbians, responding to their marginalization by the mainstream white, middle-class women’s movement, extended the insights of second wave feminism by theorizing about their experiences” (p. 9). Thus, feminism of the third wave advocates intersectionality or the idea “that identity is intersectional...that gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are interlocking and that oppression is not experienced simply along one axis” (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, p. 9). Second, the third wave of

feminism rejects the second wave notion of “sisterhood,” perceiving it as essentializing and creating “a single-mindedly white, heterosexual feminist perspective” (Celello, 2007, p. 341). Evans (2003) notes that to third wavers, “the most powerful writers among them were women of color who challenged what they perceived to be monolithic, white, middle-class ‘sisterhood.’ They never experienced feminism as a sisterhood of sameness...they stumbled over saying ‘we’” (p. 230). The second wave declaration, “sisterhood is powerful,” is not widely endorsed by women of the third wave. Last, third wave feminist activism places great stock in individuality. Keetley and Pettegrew (1997) write, “third-wave feminists tend to promote the idea of individuality...and find allies among men, not all of them are co-opted by patriarchy” (p. 434). The emphasis on individuality also regularly finds third wavers at odds with those within their own cohort. Intergenerational conflict “is frequently fought between twenty-something women and women themselves only in their thirties” (Keetley & Pettegrew, 1997, p. 434). Evans (2003) writes, “Third Wavers...participate in public debate with others of their own generation about what feminism might mean and how it needs to change” (p. 231). Thus, while the third wave was made possible by second wave feminism, it differentiates itself ideologically and in practice. In this way, “the populist feminist mission [of the third wave] is not consciousness-raising but consciousness-changing” (Siegel, 1997, p. 64).

The obvious differences between third wave feminism and its second wave predecessors has been cause for friction as well as sisterly collaboration in the early 1990s. Whittier (1995) characterizes the relationship as one of “cooperation and connection as well as discontinuity and conflict” (p. 233). The tension between the two generations made for front-page news in the early 1990s with mentions of a “Turf War on Feminism” taking place between them (Garnett, 1992, p. K10). Discord has occurred along ideological and rhetorical lines. For example, “one

way that the third wave distinguishes itself from the second wave is through its emphasis on paradox, multiplicity, and messiness” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 16). Rhetorically speaking, the agenda of the third wave is advocated differently. Dicker and Piepmeier (2003) suggest the “language, strategies, and scope of feminism have evolved tremendously” (p. 149). Another source of tension between the two waves is over leadership and “ownership” of the movement. Baumgardner and Richards (2000) suggest that some second wave women “often deny that they could benefit from younger feminists’ knowledge and experiences” (p. 222). Whittier (1995) too suggests it is “painful for longtime feminists to see newer entrants to the movement dismissing their dearly held beliefs or changing organizations they struggled to form” (p. 238). While the apparent divisions between the two generations have put feminists at odds with one another, some scholars suggest that there is continuity between older and younger women. Whittier (1995) makes this point when she writes, “In the end, though, both generations shared important goals: improving women’s lives and ultimately freeing women of all races, classes, and sexual orientations from domination. These passionate commitments link the generations as part of a continuous feminist struggle” (p. 244).

In addition to its major tenets, the third wave of feminism emphasizes non-hierarchical and diverse forms of leadership. Baumgardner and Richards (2000) urge, “it is exactly that multiplicity – of individuals and of expertise, among other qualities – that we believe defines third wave leadership” (pp. 159-160). Moreover, the authors find that quality leaders of the third wave hold “expertise grounded in experience,” are “not necessarily ‘within the movement,’” and “embrace individual responsibility and self-worth” (2000, pp. 164-166). Although third wave feminists reject the notion of a movement figurehead, women such as bell hooks and Rebecca Walker are celebrated contemporary feminist leaders. hooks’ commitment to challenging “white

bourgeois women's unthinking" has made her "one of the women predominately identified with a feminist 'third wave'" (Gamble, 2000, p. 53). Like bell hooks, Rebecca Walker has also been at the forefront of the third wave. Baumgardner and Richards (2000) consider Walker "emblematic" of the third wave and praise her ability to "maintain generational ties while simultaneously incorporating new identities and new complexities into feminism" (p. 226). Women like Katie Roiphe, Karen Lehrman, Cathy Young, Christine Hoff Sommers, and Rene Denfeld are also "some of its most visible proponents" (Keetley and Pettegrew, 1997, p. 434).

Antifeminism in the early 1990s

The generational tension that played out in the early 1990s, among other factors, helped to fuel a popular antifeminism of the late twentieth century. As Keetley and Pettegrew (1997) observe, "the late 1980s and early 1990s brought retrenchment and backlash against feminism" (p. 430). In general, three main sources contributed to a backlash against feminism in the early 1990s.

First, scholars attribute the backlash in part to an era of conservatism ushered in by the election of Ronald Reagan. The "New Right" that Reagan and his successor George Bush became known by "opposed most of the goals of the women's liberation movement" (Kimball, 2005, p. xvii). Kimball (2005) suggests that antifeminism was evident among the New Right in that,

The Reagan presidency opposed abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), tried to restrict Title IX regarding gender equality on college campuses (mainly applied to sports), and restricted EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity) enforcement by appointing reactionary Clarence Thomas as its head. (p. xvii)

Moreover, George Bush's presidency from 1989-1993 continued much of Reagan's legacy in terms of his attitude towards the women's movement by opposing "equality legislation and family leave" (Kimball, 2005, p. xvii). Conservative forces of the New Right also focused heavily on "family values" to oppose the feminist movement of the early 1990s. The "New Right strategy of mobilizing anxiety over gender and family change" or the use of "pro-family rhetoric" typified the strategy of social conservatives (Ryan, 1992, p. 158). Popular political pundits such as Rush Limbaugh also helped deliver an antifeminist message to the masses. In 1994, Limbaugh was quoted as saying, "Women were doing quite well in this country before feminism came along" (as cited in Rosenberg, p. 31). Antifeminists like Phyllis Schlafly echoed the same sentiment, urging women to "stay home with your children; delay professional achievements until after the kids are grown; [and] defer to your husband as head of household" (Vozzella, 1994, p. 1).

Second, the idea that feminism was passé also helped to fuel a feminist backlash in the early 1990s. The notion of "post-feminism" was a widely popular term used to discredit the feminist movement, suggesting that it was no longer relevant or necessary. Coppock, Haydon and Richter (1995) note that "comment in the media, in politics and in industry became scattered with references to the 1990s as an 'enlightened' or 'post-feminist' period. Now it was argued, all had been achieved" (p. 3). The popular press was also littered with references to post-feminism. In a 1994 *Newsweek* piece titled "Sisterhood Was Powerful," Shapiro suggested that "complaints about the women's movement are piling up" (p. 68). Post-feminist sentiment portrayed the women's movement negatively suggesting that,

American feminism is dominated today by a group of fanatic women determined to persuade the public that women are the slaves of a 'patriarchy,' a 'male hegemony,' a

‘sex/gender system,’ in which men relentlessly seek to keep women submissive and cowering. For them, all society’s institutions perpetuate female subjugation. (Grenier, 1994, p. A21)

In a *Washington Times* opinion piece, Fields (1992b) characterized the 1990s landscape as “post-feminist America, where best selling self-help books tell women how to catch a man” and where “the frequency of cosmetic surgery is up, obsessive dieting is up, eating disorders are up, obsessive exercising is up, and advertising for male companions continues to fill the back of big city magazines and even intellectual reviews” (p. G1). In a *Washington Post* editorial Quinn put it more simply when she wrote, “Feminism as we have known it is dead” (1992, p. C4). In addition, women’s reluctance to refer to themselves as “feminist” further evidenced the presence of a post-feminist tone in the United States. In 1994, *The Washington Times* reported that a *Time/CNN* opinion poll found, “63 percent [of women] didn’t consider themselves ‘feminists’” (Grenier, p. A21). An op-ed piece titled “Don’t Call Me a Feminist” in *The Dallas Morning News* captured this sentiment perfectly, in which its writer commented, “I cringe at being called a feminist. To me, the designation is as offensive as a racist label” (Berry, 1992, p. 5C). Finally, post-feminist ideology suggested that feminism did not accurately reflect the “true” desires of women. As Fields wrote in *The Dallas Morning News*, “Feminism helped many other women to hide from themselves, from their instincts and intuitions” (1992a, p. 5C). Post-feminism suggested that women really yearned to be wives and mothers and feminism had deprived them of this. Prominent antifeminist Phyllis Schlafly popularized this argument by claiming, “The feminist movement sold women a bill of goods that it’s more fulfilling to have a job than a family, and secondly, that you can have it all at the same time...most women do want home, husband, family and children” (as cited in Vozzella, 1994, p. 1).

Third, feminists contributed to the antifeminist sentiment of the early 1990s by attacking their own. Ideologically, emergent feminists increasingly critiqued the popular position of the second wave (equity feminism) in favor of “difference” feminism. Equity feminism suggested that women sought political, social and economic rights on equal footing with men. Women advocating difference feminism perceived women’s “dedication to the single issue of women’s equality with men” as problematic (Keetley & Pettegrew, 1997, p. 430). Thus, difference feminism celebrates women as uniquely “different” than men. It endorses the notion that “women as a group need protection because they are naturally weaker or more vulnerable than men” (Keetley & Pettegrew, 1997, p. 435). To make things more complicated, younger feminists critiqued difference feminism for turning women into “victims.” Camille Paglia was a leading advocate of this thought, which suggested that feminism failed to empower women, and therefore turned women into victims of their own circumstances. Dissenting views among and between generations helped antifeminist sentiment by portraying the movement as less than unified. A lack of cohesion among women helped to establish the idea that feminism was no longer the united social force it once was and was at risk of imploding. Moreover, leading feminist texts in the early 1990s supported the idea that feminists were up in arms with one another. For example, Katie Roiphe’s *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus* (1993), Christina Hoff Sommers’ *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women* (1994), and Rene Denfeld’s *The New Victorians: A Young Woman’s Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (1995) freely criticized feminist elders and their own peers within the movement. Keetley and Pettegrew (1997) suggest that these texts, as evidenced by their titles, outline the “limitations of [their second wave] foremothers” and take issue with being “misrepresented by what they see as second-wave feminism and its perceived 1980s legacy of women’s sexless

equality and victimized difference” (p. 434). Thus, while feminism in the early 1990s celebrated diversity of thought, the notion of incompatibility among women was used against the feminist movement. Ideological dissension was looked upon negatively and helped to foster a post-feminist climate that worked to dismantle feminism.

Gloria Steinem in the Early 1990s

In the early 1990s, Gloria Steinem was a celebrated feminist to some but to a handful of women she was considered passé. Towards this end, Steinem generated both positive and negative press. On the positive side of things, the popular press referred to her as an “icon of feminism” and a “real-life activist foremother” (Peterson, 1994, p. 4D; Pozner, 2003, p. 16). Moreover, major third wave theorists suggested she was “generally considered to be the ‘it’ girl of women’s lib” and celebrated that “Steinem’s own originality and ability to speak to the particular demands of her time are precisely what made her effective” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, pp. 159-162). Steinem’s legacy for reaching out to all women remained intact in the early 1990s. She substantiated her egalitarian approach to feminism in a 1991 *USA Today* piece when she argued that “the most exciting changes [in feminism] are happening from the bottom up” (p. 11A). Further, in *The New York Times* Corrigan (1994) praised Steinem for her broad-based appeal: “Ms. Steinem’s enduring contribution to the women’s movement has been her ability to popularize feminist issues to a wide and often wary audience” (p. 37). Similarly, in *Time* magazine, Attinger (1992) lauded Steinem for “expanding its [feminism’s] horizons to include everyone” (p. 55). Also, Steinem’s biographer Helibrun (1995) documented that “Steinem’s greatest strength is her instant identification with ‘common’ people” (p. 399). When Steinem published *Moving Beyond Words* in 1994 her traditional all-encompassing style was still evident. One reviewer suggested, “If one wanted to make it more likely that women of privilege

would find solidarity with women from lower rungs on the economic ladder, giving them copies of *Moving Beyond Words* would rank as a very promising strategy” (Limerick, 1994, p. X1).

Thus, in many ways, Steinem remained at the forefront of public dialogue on feminism.

On the other hand, Steinem’s presence in the early 1990s was also met with harsh critique. Many felt that Steinem’s moment was past. Antifeminists such as Phyllis Schlafly remained critical of Steinem. In 1994, Schlafly asked, “Do you *really* want to be Gloria Steinem?” (as cited in Vozzella, p. 1). Steinem was perceived more negatively in the broader picture as well. Writing for *The Dallas Morning News*, Fields (1992a) accused Steinem of perpetuating victimhood: “Gloria Steinem look[s] at women as victims of the culture” (p. 5C). In his *Washington Times* piece, Grenier (1994) referred to her as “the grotesque Gloria Steinem” (p. A21). A handful of feminists too held disdain for Steinem. Camille Paglia freely lamented Steinem and referred to her as “Stalin...she wants to own feminism” (as cited in Garnett, 1992, p. K10). Paglia’s animosity towards Steinem was also chronicled in *The Washington Times* where it was reported that Paglia “renders Gloria Steinem a dull-witted child of a weaker sex, intellectually disabled, [and] theoretically challenged” (Fields, 1994a, p. B8). Another popular third wave feminist Christine Sommers suggested in 1994 that Steinem was “head of the Ministry of (*Ms.*) Information. A gender warrior who cannot help fighting battles long since won. Someone should tell her to get a life: we have the suffrage” (as cited in Greig, p. 1). In addition, others suggested that Steinem was no longer relevant. Debbie Stoller “was quoted calling Gloria Steinem a dinosaur” and in *The Washington Times*, Steinem was referred to as “a senior citizen sister” as well as a “granny feminist” who has become “as humorless and arrogant as the men [she] once railed against” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 137; Fields, 1994b, p. A21). While Steinem never addressed criticisms like this directly, it is reasonable to suggest that

she was aware of them. In a 1994 interview with *The USA Today*, Steinem said she feared losing the spotlight: “I am afraid of being invisible, of counting for nothing. I fear that no matter how hard I work, it will all disappear” (as cited in Peterson, p. 4D).

Despite critiques, in the early 1990s Steinem remained politically active. Helibrun (1995) writes that, “Steinem continued much as before to devote a good deal of time and energy to causes and political commitments” (p. 389). She was active in national politics. In 1992, Steinem “campaign[ed] vigorously for women candidates, and took part in a number of conferences supporting Anita Hill and publicizing the newly exposed question of sexual harassment” and was also a “generous supporter of Carol Mosely Braun” and “all women candidates” (Helibrun, 1995, p. 389). In addition to national politics, Steinem urged collaboration with third wave feminists. Baumgardner and Richards (2000) document that Steinem has advocated making “connections with campus radicals, twenty-something writers, burgeoning activists, and the ‘peons’ who answer the phones and read the slush manuscripts” (p. 231). Kimball (2005) also suggested that Steinem saw value in third wave feminists’ perspectives: “Steinem...adds that her generation should enjoy them and learn from their willingness to deal openly with conflict” (p. xxx). Steinem was also busy writing in the early 1990s in addition to supporting others. In 1992 she released *Revolution From Within*, followed just two years later by *Moving Beyond Words* (1994).

In 1994 when Steinem released *Moving Beyond Words*, her book received praise and some blame – much like she was received more generally. Helibrun (1995) writes that overall *Moving Beyond Words* “did not achieve the commercial success of her two earlier books” due in part to the fact that her book lacked a “coherent theme” being composed of six disparate essays (pp. 405-406). *Moving Beyond Words* was crafted for women who were devoted followers of

Steinem's rhetoric. She emphasized that much of her advocacy was for women who were mainstays of the movement since the second wave. Elshtain's (1994) review of Steinem's book speaks to this point when she argues that readers of Steinem "shared her assumptions and her conclusions, including the conviction that 'the personal is the political'" (p. 33). Furthermore, *Moving Beyond Words* was aimed at an older demographic. This is not surprising given that in the early 1990s, Steinem often argued that women get increasingly radical as they age. As Helibrun (1995) writes, "Steinem has noted that women grow more radical with age; they may in fact, she seems to suggest, grow in any way they find alluring if they are willing to abandon the suitable" (p. 404). Reviewers picked up on the fact that Steinem sought to reach readers more advanced in age. Jardine (1994) noted: "Older women are in a position to make a difference, and Steinem, at 60, is going on trying" with *Moving Beyond Words* (p. 1). Reviewing the book for *The Toronto Sun*, Crittenden (1994) noted,

The book celebrates Steinem's approaching the ripe old age of 60, and is aimed at women of her own generation – her 'beloved age peers' – as well as trying to persuade young women that growing older doesn't mean growing less radical, a term she wears with pride. (p. M22)

Crittenden (1994) also suggested that Steinem believed, "feminist groups are too preoccupied with attracting younger followers and are ignoring older women" and that there were "energies to be tapped in this older generation" (p. M22). Thus, Steinem attempted to reach a broad swath of women with *Moving Beyond Words*, but especially older women.

In particular, "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" received wide attention in the press. In "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" Steinem attempted to dismantle a patriarchal approach to gender through her fictional biography of "Phyllis Freud." Steinem covered Freud's life as "Phyllis"

from birth to well into his professional career. Along the way, she provided glimpses into Freud's childhood and personal life, but primarily focused on Freud's professional life, including his major collaborations, famous patients, theories and general trajectory as a psychiatrist. The biography of "Phyllis" accurately detailed the realities of Freud's life, but all gendered pronouns were changed. In the introduction to the essay, Steinem (1994) promised, "I can vouch for the fact that everything in Phyllis's life and work springs from something in Sigmund's. Only words having to do with gender have been changed" (p. 31). Steinem buttressed her essay with extensive footnotes, which appeared on every page of the almost 70-page essay. Unlike the essay, Steinem's footnotes were not written in gender reversal mode. She told the reader,

I've added footnotes...wherever I feared the reader might think Phyllis had gone off the deep end, or some piece of information seemed to cry out for inclusion, or I just couldn't resist. As in so much of life, the fun is in the text, and the truth is in the footnotes. (1994, p. 32)

In this way, Steinem's essay contained two distinct but complementary parts that combined to support the biography of "Phyllis" Freud.

"What If Freud Were Phyllis?" was created as a result of two events in Steinem's life. First, Steinem's essay was inspired by her earlier and much shorter piece – "What If Men Could Menstruate." In "Phyllis" biography, Steinem (1994) wrote, "Like all of us, Phyllis Freud was born of two parents. Her mother was an improvisation I used to do at lectures in the 1970s, which finally grew into an essay called 'If Men Could Menstruate'" (p. 19). The second source of inspiration – "Phyllis" "father" – was the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which Steinem addressed in 1981 and in 1983 (p. 20). She first spoke to the APA in 1981 at the request of a small, primarily female caucus within the organization who called themselves Psychiatrists

for Equal Rights. Steinem came in “to help with their project of getting the APA to move its national meetings out of states that hadn’t ratified the Equal Rights Amendment,” and therefore to persuade members to boycott those states (1994, p. 20). Along with a caucus member, Steinem “suggested publishing the registration lists for the next national meeting...so patients would know whether or not their psychiatrists were supporting this ERA boycott and be able to act on that knowledge should they so choose” (1994, p. 21). That recommendation generated controversy because it “was such a reversal of the usual power relationship between (overwhelmingly female) patients and their (overwhelmingly male) psychiatrists” (Steinem, 1994, p. 21). Thus, in 1981 Steinem’s notion of gender reversal was already in place. In 1983, Steinem’s use of gender reversal was activated again when she addressed the APA in a more official capacity. Steinem (1994) recounted,

That’s when I realized the menstruation fantasy of the 1970s must have been gestating with the 1981 APA experience all along. Because suddenly there she was, full-blown as if born from the head of Athena, an entirely new creature – Viennese accent, cigarette holder, tailored suit, and all – *Dr. Phyllis Freud*. (p. 23)

For her 1983 address to APA members Steinem was asked to tackle the following issue: “the alarming number of psychiatrists who took advantage of power and privacy to exploit their patients sexually” (1994, p. 22). Steinem used “Phyllis” to take on the issue. She reasoned that,

Clearly, this was a woman whose very existence could help members of that august and authoritative body imagine how they would feel if: society and psychiatry were reversed so that women were 89 percent of APA members and men were the three fifths of their patients. (1994, p. 23)

Steinem (1994) recalled, “I had time only to introduce Dr. Phyllis Freud briefly and do a few reversals...[but] she did break the ice, turn the tables, create some laughter, and I think, some empathy too” (p. 24). The success Steinem found in using “Phyllis” prompted her to continue with the reversal in more detail with “What If Freud Were Phyllis?”

While “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” informed readers on Freud’s life generally, Steinem’s purpose transcended biography. Steinem (1994) wrote, “our problem isn’t Freud but his existence as a code name for a set of cultural beliefs that serve too deep and convenient a purpose to be easily knocked off” (p. 30). The cultural, social and political system that she believed Freud helped to create in part was antithetical to feminism and harmful to women. Steinem (1994) argued, “Disproving Freud’s beliefs has continued as the women’s movement has brought women and men one of its most valuable lessons: tell personal truths and challenge general theories” (p. 30). Therefore, Steinem used Freud not only to undermine some of his theoretical ideas but also for the larger purpose of weakening his supposed “patriarchal wisdom” at the expense of women. She wrote,

So to see how it feels to be on the wrong end of the Freudian myth, as well as to exorcise its power with laughter once and for all, I propose that everyone in the psychology trade, male or female, plus male human beings in general – indeed, all of us in this Freud-ianized culture – imagine a profession and a society influenced by the work, even the worship, of the greatest most written about, mythic, and fiercely defended thinker in Western civilization: Dr. Phyllis Freud. (1994, p. 31)

Steinem’s essay was praised for pointing out the pervasive nature of gender inequity in contemporary society through critiquing and satirizing the life as well as the works of Sigmund Freud. Steinem perceived Freud as the quintessential subject of feminist critique having long

“deplored Freud’s antifeminist views” and seeing “the disastrous effects of his theories on many women” (Stern, 1997, p. 408). Thus, she used Freud to demonstrate “how undeniably sexist Freud and some of his theories really were” (Stern, 1997, p. 413). However, Steinem sought to make larger generalizations beyond Freud. She perceived Freud as emblematic of a general social endemic, noting that he “is still more respected because misogyny is not yet taken as seriously as racism” (as cited in Stern, 1997, p. 412). Therefore, according to Steinem, examination of Freud helped to illustrate the larger problem of gender inequity. Reviews of Steinem’s essay picked up on her tactic. Limerick (1994) argued, “The essay most likely to convert the resistant is ‘What If Freud Were Phyllis?’” and suggested that it had a consciousness-raising ability: “Thanks to Steinem’s essay on Freud...I believe, now that I do get it” (p. X1). Ross (1994) made a similar point when he said, Steinem “challenges the way half of humankind exercises their abilities and lives out their destinies” (p. 1). Jardine (1994) reiterated Steinem’s point exactly: “If Freud had been a woman, Steinem teases, could we have taken all those crazy theories so seriously?” (p. 1).

“What If Freud Were Phyllis?” also gave Steinem credit as a serious researcher. In the essay, Steinem provided extensive footnotes that told the “truth” about Freud’s attitude towards women. Towards this end, the essay was drenched in footnotes on every page that accounted for his perceptions based on scholarly evidence and showed Steinem’s extensive paper trail of research. The effect, according to one review, was “demolishing Freud,” or as another stated, “a blistering satire of the life of Sigmund Freud” (Limerick, 1994, p. X1; Fichtner, 1994, p. 6E). Billen (1994) noted, Steinem’s “Adding footnotes citing the exact sources, parallels with Sigmund” (p. 14). Shields (1994) also praised Steinem for taking on the arduous task of accounting for Freud’s literature:

The essay comes decked out with footnotes, and these form a running counter-essay in which gender is played straight. This strategy can be brain-scrambling for the reader until the rhythm of cross-reading is established, and then it becomes a delicious game. (p. 1)

Finally, Toynbee (1994) noted “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” was written “with extensive and scholarly footnotes” and consequently, “Steinem traces Freud’s mendacities, elisions, and deceptive claims about the success of his treatments. She exposes attitudes to women mercilessly, drawing on his letters” (p. 1). In “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Steinem demonstrated that not only was she skilled at reversals and satire, but that she was also capable of providing straightforward, thoroughly researched information.

The obvious praise Steinem received was offset by reviews that did not accept the arguments in her essay or the gender reversal style in which it was written. Negative reactions suggested that Steinem’s focus on Freud was untimely. Helibrun (1995) wrote, “Few other than the most religious Freudians today follow these precepts slavishly” and moreover, “Freudian psychoanalysis...began to loose its grip on women’s minds over the years in which *Ms.* flourished” (p. 406). As a result, Steinem’s essay was simply outdated. Barber (1994) also found that Steinem’s critique of Freud was unnecessary, asking: “Why do feminists always want to beat their heads against Freud? No good ever comes of it” (p. 1). Finally, Elshtain (1994) found Steinem out-of-touch with (academic) reality, saying, “Here she is spectacularly behind the curve. She seems completely unaware that dozens of contemporary scholars with impeccable feminist credentials are inventively bringing Freud to bear on their own work” (p. 33). Other readers found Steinem rather unconvincing. Stern (1997) wrote, “the essay was labored...and its ultimate effect was cartoonish and puerile...As an intellectually compelling argument for the proposition that Freud’s reputation should be worth *bubkes*...[it] was not terribly persuasive” (p.

413). Steinem's use of role reversal and satire complicated her point as well according to critics. Stern (1997) wrote that, "A lot of people who read 'What If Freud Were Phyllis' said, 'You know, the exposé part is so interesting. Why don't you cut out the satire? The Phyllis part'" (p. 412). Similarly, Barber (1994) wrote, "This contains plenty of fascinating facts, but would have been better written straight, without the gender reversal and fancy footnotes, as a sober, reasoned critique" (p. 1). Elshtain (1994) as well commented that Steinem's reversal technique was ineffective in that "she invents words and make-believe 'scholarly' footnotes" (p. 33).

In the early 1990s Gloria Steinem continued to make the news and contribute writing to the feminist movement in addition to the other important supporting roles that she took on. However, it is clear that she was no longer considered *the one* at the helm of the women's movement. It is also fair to say that that was a position Steinem never wanted anyway. Still, Steinem's support of the feminist movement suggests that she was an active figure, even as she approached her sixtieth birthday and even as the third wave of feminism began to outshine second wave activism. "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" evidences that the tenets of the second wave did not get left behind. Steinem reinvented them for a contemporary context while being cognizant of the fact that the movement had changed. Next, I explain how "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" functioned in the light of its historical context.

Analysis

In *Moving Beyond Words* (1994), Steinem declared that she sought "radical" change. For Steinem "radical" change meant undermining "The false division of human nature into 'feminine' and 'masculine,'" which she determined as "the root of all other divisions into subject and object, active and passive – the beginning of hierarchy" (p. 1994, p. 270). Thus, women could achieve true equality only by dislodging binary modes of thinking, from which constructs

like “masculine” and “feminine” stemmed. As Steinem (1994) put it, “digging out the ‘masculine/feminine’ paradigm undermines all birth-based hierarchies, and alters our view of human nature, the natural world, and the cosmos itself” (p. 270). Thus, Steinem’s goal of radical change was concerned with attacking the foundational problems of gender inequality. This boiled down to dislodging cultural beliefs, social tenets and language that rationalized as well as facilitated gender inequity.

In 1994, Steinem’s mission to get at the root problems associated with gender inequity faced a competing set of issues. First, the status of the movement had changed and, by 1994, a third wave agenda called for attention to more nuanced agenda items rather than returning to foundational issues. In this way, the notion of attacking fundamental problems appeared passé in some respects and made Steinem look dated in comparison to younger feminists. Second, the feminist movement continued to face a backlash, buttressed by post-feminist ideology and popular sentiment that endorsed ideas such as “feminism is dead” or a non-issue. Thus, a backlash against feminism suggested that Steinem would have to make her message resonate, demonstrating that the women’s movement mattered to society at large and that there was a need for it in the first place. Third, the feminist movement in the early 1990s was no longer the unified social force it once was. Feminist movement was fragmented and represented a variety of standpoints. Moreover, conflict over ideas within the movement had become acceptable and friction between second wave feminists and third wave feminists had also come to the fore. Clearly, Steinem faced numerous obstacles that stood in the way of advancing her “radical” agenda.

In this chapter I argue that Steinem’s “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” functions as a unifying text that bridges second wave and third wave feminists. Steinem’s concern with the

foundations of gender inequity focused on its cause, its pervasive nature, and the problems it sustained contemporarily. By relying on 1) the topic of Freudian thinking, 2) humor, and 3) an academic style, Steinem appealed to women across the generational divide, attacking foundational problems of sexism and suggesting shared solutions. In order to illustrate how Steinem's rhetoric works, I have chosen three key passages from "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" I explain how they work in light of the time in which Steinem wrote and as a message geared towards her key demographic of older and younger women, representing second and third wave feminist generations.

Unifying Two Generations of Feminists

In this first passage I analyze, I argue that Steinem outlined foundational problems associated with gender inequity in order to create identification between second wave and third wave feminists and to point out shared rhetorical as well practical feminist issues. Steinem specifically took aim at the biological rationale as a method of rationalizing women's inferior societal status in political, religious, and cultural settings. In order to bridge together two generations of women, Steinem relied on the topic of Freudian thinking and humor. Steinem's approach enabled her to attack a root problem that she perceived as instrumental in sanctioning gender inequality. It also supported her purpose of reaching older as well as younger women.

Steinem (1994) wrote,

It's important to understand that when Phyllis was growing up in Vienna, women were considered superior because of their ability to give birth. From the family parlor to the great matriarchal institutions of politics and religion, this was a uniform belief...Indeed, these beliefs in women's natural right to dominate were the very pillars of Western matriarchal civilization – impossible to weaken without endangering the edifice. At the

drop of a hat, wise women would explain that while men might dabble imitatively in the arts, they could never become truly *great* painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, or anything else that demanded originality, for they lacked a womb, the very source of originality...And because childbirth caused women to use the medical system more than men did, making childbirth its natural focus, there was little point in encouraging young men to become physicians, surgeons, researchers, or anything other than nurses and other low-paid health care helpers...In addition, men's lack of firsthand experience with birth and nonbirth – with choosing between existence and nonexistence, conception and contraception, as women must do so wisely for all their fertile years – severely inhibited their potential for developing a sense of justice and ethics...It also lessened men's ability to make life-and-death judgments, which explained their absence from decision making positions in the judiciary, law enforcement, the military, and other such professions. True, one or two exceptional men might ascend to a position requiring high moral judgment, but they had been trained to 'think like a woman' by rare contact with academia or because they had no sisters and their mothers were forced to burden their tender sons with matriarchal duties...After life-giving wombs and sustenance-giving breasts, women's ability to menstruate was the most obvious proof of their superiority...We can see why Phyllis grew up believing that men's deepest satisfactions lay in manual labor, housekeeping, child care, and, among the upper classes, the social graces of embroidering or playing simple tunes upon the piano. We can understand why Freud herself, a serious matriarch...was not surprised when men among the lower classes so often became prostitutes...It was simply accepted for males to be homemakers,

ornaments, devoted sons, and sexual companions (providing they were well-trained of course). (pp. 32-39)

In this passage, Steinem helped create mutual identification among feminists of all ages by tracing the problem of the biological rationale. Steinem also pointed out rhetorical and practical issues of feminism that could be shared between women of both generations. She supported her argument by using the topic of Freudian thinking and humor.

In order to coalesce two generations of women together, Steinem started out by illustrating that feminists universally shared the problem of the biological rationale. Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking as a vehicle to point out the biological rationale, which she perceived as a critical piece to the foundation of gender inequality. The topic of Freudian thinking helped Steinem to illuminate a shared problem in the biological rationale. She advocated that it was important for feminists of all generations to pay attention to this root problem because it remained a central piece in fostering gender inequality, even in a contemporary context.

Steinem's focus on the biological rationale was clear in this passage. In order to evidence the biological rationale, she used the topic of Freudian thinking to illustrate that it maintained relevancy and therefore should be of concern for feminists because it wielded negative social implications for women. Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking to emphasize the biological rationale when she wrote that, "It's important to understand that when Phyllis was growing up in Vienna, women were considered superior because of their ability to give birth. From the family parlor to the great matriarchal institutions of politics and religion, this was a uniform belief" (p. 32). Steinem's application of Freudian thinking was also quite clear in that she suggested, "After life-giving wombs and sustenance-giving breasts, women's ability to menstruate was the most

obvious *proof* of their superiority” (p. 36, emphasis added). Moreover, Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking to convey the social consequences that the biological rationale maintained. When Steinem suggested that, “We can see why Phyllis grew up believing that men’s deepest satisfactions lay in manual labor, housekeeping, [and] child care,” it is evident that she used a Freudian standpoint as a means of expressing the sort of sexist thinking that was based on the biological rationale (p. 38). Similarly, Steinem’s use of Freudian thinking helped to convey sexist beliefs about women, based on the notion of innate biological differences, such as the idea that “It was simply accepted for males to be homemakers, ornaments, devoted sons, and sexual companions (providing they were well-trained of course” (p. 39).

For Steinem, the topic of Freudian thinking served as a vehicle to detail the nature and extent of the problem of the biological rationale. Steinem argued that the rationale was an omnipresent and uniform belief that was used unfairly as a determinant of women’s social “position.” Thus, through the topic of Freudian thinking, Steinem indicated that the biological rationale was not just a thing of the past. It was alive and well and it continued to underwrite gender inequality. Steinem argued that contemporarily speaking, the rationale was expansive and firmly entrenched. That the biological rationale persisted in “the family parlor” as well as the “great matriarchal institutions of politics and religion” evidenced that it flourished in both private and public realms of women’s lives (p. 33). When Steinem referred to the rationale’s tenets as “the very pillars of Western matriarchal civilization,” she illustrated that it was firmly ingrained and not just about to go away (p. 33). By implication, she suggested that her feminist readers ought to pay attention to it. Steinem found that the biological rationale was not only commonplace but was also socially acceptable. Towards this end, she explained that the rationale was normalized to the extent that to act in violation of its tenets was an anomaly. Hence, she wrote

that only “one or two exceptional men might ascend to a position requiring high moral judgment” (p. 35). For Steinem, the biological rationale was not a passé problem of feminist critique. That it was pervasive, comfortably ingrained in society and merely acceptable speaks to the fact that Steinem warned it was more problematic than ever.

Steinem’s decision to evidence the problematic nature of the biological rationale addressed the challenge of reaching women of second and third wave generations. Honing in on the biological rationale helped Steinem reach a broad swath of women. Steinem spoke to a problem that is undeniably definitive of sexism’s roots. In this way, she addressed an issue that related to all women as feminists. At the same time, attacking the biological rationale allowed Steinem to avoid alienating localized feminist identities. Regardless of whether one identified as a third wave feminist or considered oneself of Steinem’s generation, the biological rationale was an irrefutable source of sexism, endemic to gender inequality and related to the movement in a general way. Thus, emphasizing the biological rationale was effective in bridging two generations of women because it possessed a timeless quality. Yet, at the same time, Steinem’s attention to the biological rationale possessed unique meanings to older and younger women. The biological rationale clearly resonated with women of Steinem’s era because it equated popular second wave themes about equity feminism in which women argued that biological differences were not capable of determining one’s social status or suitable for stripping one of economic and political rights. For younger women, Steinem’s discussion of the biological rationale served as a reminder to pay recourse to a foundational idea that maintained a relationship to the contemporary movement they supported. By emphasizing its powerful grasp on society, even in contemporary times, Steinem suggested that younger women revisit an age-old problem that played a very current role in their lives.

Finally, the topic of Freudian thinking also resonated with Steinem's audience. For second wave feminists or women of Steinem's generation, using the topic of Freudian thinking was hardly a stretch. In earlier years, Freudian thinking played a preeminent societal role and his attitude towards women was taken seriously. Thus, it is fair to say that Steinem's readers from the second wave possessed some level of familiarity with Freud. What is more, as feminists, older followers of Steinem were also attuned to some of the pitfalls of Freud's ideas about gender. For second wave feminists this was best captured in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) where she pointed out the danger in Freud's theories as they applied to women. In 1963, Friedan argued that the feminine mystique was "elevated by Freudian theory" and "sounded a single, overprotective, life-restricting, future-denying note for women" (p. 125). For women of a younger generation, Freud's beliefs seemed out of touch as many of his theories about women had been debunked. Yet, by using Freudian thought as a vehicle to illuminate the biological rationale, Steinem demonstrated that even antiquated beliefs maintain a sense of relevancy. She reminded young feminists that the past is not always in the past. In this way, Steinem made the topic of Freudian thinking relevant to young women, not in terms of Freud himself, but as a means to reach a political end.

In addition to using the topic of Freudian thinking, Steinem used humor to achieve the second purpose of this passage: to show the rhetorical and practical battles that feminists needed to continue to fight. In doing so, Steinem bridged together second wave and third wave activists, showing women of both generations what needed to be done in order to overcome oppositional forces.

Steinem spelled out the rhetorical and practical sides of the feminist mission that lay ahead in the early 1990s. Steinem approached this task by using humor that "turn[ed] the tables"

on gender (p. 24). “Radical” activism characterized Steinem’s approach to feminism, which she argued was the only way to achieve change. As she joked, “matriarchy” was “impossible to weaken without endangering the edifice” (p. 33). Steinem suggested to feminist readers that there were still rhetorical battles to be won. The central battle was regarding the way women were talked about by oppositional forces and even women themselves. Steinem’s mission to amend public and private talk is evident when she writes, “At the drop of a hat, wise women would explain that while men might dabble imitatively in the arts, they could never become truly *great* painters, sculptors, musicians, poets or anything else that demanded originality” (p. 35). Steinem pointed to the same rhetorical problem, advising jokingly that, “There was little point in encouraging young men to become physicians, surgeons, researchers, or anything other than nurses and other low-paid health care helpers” (p. 34). Also, the idea that suggested men “had been trained to ‘think like a woman’” illustrated Steinem’s argument that the way women were talked about was sexist (p. 35). From a rhetorical standpoint, Steinem used humor to claim that talk, whether it be in the public sphere or in the private realm, needed to be rid of sexist assumptions about women.

Practically speaking, Steinem pointed to areas of concern for feminists of all ages as well. Thus, on a more pragmatic level, Steinem used humor. Steinem argued that, “the personal is political.” Towards this end, she suggested that women’s experiential knowledge should be privileged, whether it was in regards to reproductive health or on a legislative level. She used humor to point out that women should be in charge of their own destinies when it came to the politics of their bodies or the law. Towards this end, Steinem humorously noted, “Men’s lack of firsthand experience with birth and nonbirth – with choosing between existence and nonexistence, conception and contraception, as women must do so wisely for all their fertile

years – severely inhibited their potential for developing a sense of justice and ethics” (p. 35). Steinem’s other agenda item focused on the lack of women in positions of power. She cited “their absence from decision making positions in the judiciary, law enforcement, the military, and other such professions” as evidence of unequal access to various professions, especially those considered traditionally “male” (p. 35). In sum, Steinem’s feminist agenda addressed rhetorical and practical issues with specific attention paid to sexist discourse, the standpoint that “the personal is political” and the unbalance of power between the sexes in the public sphere.

Steinem’s use of humor helped her to speak to rhetorical and practical issues relevant to contemporary feminism. By “turn[ing] the tables” on gender and conveying feminism’s issues humorously Steinem led readers to the conclusion that there was work to be done by women of all ages (p. 24). Her method of using humor indicated that there was work to be done by illustrating sentiments there were taken for granted when extended ordinarily. For example, the notion that women could not “become truly *great* painters” or “anything other than nurses and other low-paid health care helpers” could be dismissed in a contemporary setting as just the way things were (pp. 33-34). However, by putting a comical spin on these beliefs, Steinem challenged the notion that women should take conventional “wisdom” of the day as just that. Expressions that claimed a man could be trained to “think like a woman” are indicative of noticeably flawed logic when expressed in the reverse (p. 35). Ordinary language would not permit Steinem to make her point in as illuminating of a way. Steinem’s humorous approach to feminism helped her to undermine beliefs that were mistaken for contemporary reality. In this way, she directed feminist readers to the new problems that they could address.

Steinem’s use of humor also helped her to bridge her key demographic of older and younger women. The humor that Steinem used was not contingent on age; it was dependent upon

a certain feminist attitude that one must have in order to “get” her jokes. Broadly speaking, Steinem’s humor required that women endorse two basic assumptions. First, laughing at Steinem’s humor was contingent on supporting equity feminism, which claims that men and women are entitled to the same basic rights and that gender is not a detriment to women’s social, political or economic equality. In this way, jokes that men could never be as “*great*” as women at certain professions or be capable of “high moral judgment” were funny if the feminist reader ascribed to a basic belief in equality between the sexes (pp. 33-35). Second, in order to appreciate Steinem’s humor one must support the contention that, “the personal is political.” If one did not fully endorse “the personal is political slogan,” it would be difficult to grasp Steinem’s humor, given that her jokes were predicated on the unfair politicization of women’s private lives.

Steinem’s humor bridged together women of second and third wave generations in several ways. First, her comical approach worked to coalesce women together by operating from a set of basic assumptions shared by feminists. While it is fair to say not all women endorsed equity feminism or “the personal is political slogan,” these sentiments are inclusive of a broad swath of women. Steinem’s humor also brought women together by simply having some basic assumptions. Putting some fundamental parameters around getting her jokes helped her to speak to a feminist community that retained a sense of insider knowledge. The readers that perceived Steinem’s jokes as funny rather than off-putting recognized the political nature to her jokes. Finally, Steinem’s humor helped to link second and third wave feminists by functioning as an educational tool for women. Her humor was instructive in terms of its ability to express the rhetoric of the opposition and therefore educate women on what to expect from them. Thus, notions like “there was little point in encouraging young men to become physicians” or claims

that women's "absence from decision making positions" had a rational explanation became suspect (p. 35). Steinem's humor was also instructive to feminists by referencing common attitudes that even women were guilty of subscribing to. For example, to "think like a woman" illustrated a popular belief, which dictated that biology was destiny, and therefore, that women were "suited" for certain roles (p. 35). Steinem's humor helped to discredit such binary modes of thought that created false divisions of human nature into masculine and feminine. In this way, her humor served as a warning to all women, reminding them that sexist discourse is not only an oppositional force of feminism but also can penetrate the movement insiders as well.

In "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" critiquing the biological rationale and outlining a contemporary feminist agenda were vital to Steinem's goal of unifying older and younger feminists. Towards this end, she used the topic of Freudian thinking to illustrate the problem of the biological rationale and she applied humor to speak to feminism's priority rhetorical as well as practical agenda items. However, she did not stop there.

Staying Current with the Contemporary Feminist Movement

In the early 1990s, the state of feminism was markedly different than the feminism of Steinem's "heyday" in the 1970s. Simply put, the movement had changed. While Steinem remained active in the movement, it was also clear that other women emerged and became influential in their own right, carrying the feminist torch forward into the third wave of feminism. Thus, Steinem had a choice: to remain in the past or to become part of feminism's future. In the second passage I analyze, I demonstrate that Steinem chose the latter. I claim that Steinem advocated a contemporary nuance to her feminist agenda in order to appeal to second and third wave feminists. By illustrating that she was knowledgeable of not just feminism's past but also the movement's future, Steinem demonstrated to older and younger women alike that

she was relevant. However, Steinem also stuck to her core beliefs. In this way, she bridged two waves of feminism and the audience(s) that went with them. In order to enhance her feminist ethos, Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking, humor, and an academic style.

In 1994, Steinem summed up Freud's way of thinking:

It was Freud's willingness to look within patients for the cause of their problems – to be undistracted by anything they might or might not have experienced – that laid the theoretical groundwork for modern psychiatry's refreshing ability to ignore poverty, deprivation, power systems of sex, race or class, and other concrete concerns that are neither deeply felt nor changeable; and instead to concentrate on fantasies, dreams, drives, complexes, and all the individualized, profound subject matter. In fact, Phyllis Freud was soon to develop a sophisticated theory that removed all motive for investigating real events in the lives of patients: *There was no difference between fantasy and reality*...Social reformers and politicians might stew over external realities all they wished, but psychoanalysts had only to concern themselves with the internal world, of which they were the sole interpreters. Since professional competence was to be judged exclusively by colleagues, all they had to do was stick together. In this way the brilliance of Phyllis Freud has endured. (pp. 74-75)

Finally, Steinem (1994) warned what the world would be like *without* Freudian thinking:

Without trained Freudians to interpret memories, feelings, and dreams, people emerge from these dangerous therapies believing they really were abused as children, or that class or race or other externals had something to do with their feelings of rage or inferiority, or that the unconscious holds verifiable memories instead of just drives

toward sex and death, or even that a purpose of therapy is to help change society to fit the individual, instead of the other way around. (p. 80)

In this passage, Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking, humor, and an academic style to demonstrate her staying power. This boosted Steinem's ethos in the eyes of contemporary feminists and also demonstrated to older women that she continued to support enduring principles.

Steinem's emphasis on the topic of Freudian thinking in this passage is clear. This can be evidenced in several ways. First, Steinem suggested that Freudian thinking devalued experiential knowledge. When she wrote, "It was Freud's willingness to look within patients for the cause of their problems – to be undistracted by anything they might or might not have experienced," Steinem suggested that Freudian thinking did not privilege first hand experience (pp. 74-75). This was also evident when Steinem suggested that Freudian thinking "removed all motive for investigating real events in the lives of patients" (p. 75). Second, she claimed that Freudian thinking ignored women's intersectional identities. Steinem wrote that Freudian thinking "laid the theoretical groundwork for modern psychiatry's refreshing ability to ignore poverty, deprivation, power systems of sex, race, or class, and other concrete concerns that are neither deeply felt nor changeable" (p. 75). She made a similar point when she wrote that Freudian thinking denied, "that class or race or other externals had something to do with their [women's] feelings of rage or inferiority" (p. 80). Thus, according to Steinem, Freudian thinking devalued experiential knowledge and failed to acknowledge women's diversity.

Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking in order to demonstrate her own relevancy to contemporary feminism. She made herself relevant to the movement by emphasizing (some) of its core values – the importance of personal experience and intersectionality. Steinem also tied

herself to the movement by arguing that these core values faced being compromised and therefore it was necessary to fight for them. In speaking to the contemporary movement, Steinem appealed to older and younger women. Steinem's use of Freudian thinking made her agenda attractive to younger women by using the topic as a vehicle to explain some core beliefs of third wave feminism. She clearly showed that individuality and the complexity of women's identities were imperatives of contemporary feminism. Steinem attached herself to these beliefs not only by simply referencing them, but also by warning female readers that they were in jeopardy under the (still) dominant patriarchy. To this extent, Steinem showed that she too could be one of them. Steinem's message also appealed to feminists of her own generation. While she referenced third wave values, these tenets also operated as thinly disguised core values of the second wave. The notion of experiential knowledge was analogous to "the personal is political" because both ideas emphasized that a private dimension motivated women's public agenda. Intersectionality also became popular in the second wave. In this way, feminists of Steinem's generation would be familiar with this belief, especially since it was emphasized in the 1990s as an enduring critique of second wave feminism. Steinem stressing a third wave agenda helped to avail her of the belief that she was no longer relevant. She demonstrated that she was not only a foremother of the feminist movement in a historical sense but that she was attuned to a third wave agenda as well.

Steinem's use of humor also helped to boost her ethos among second and third wave feminists. Her humor was on display in this passage when she joked about feminists and about the opposition. Steinem joked about feminists and their methods, calling them "reformers" (p. 75). She stated, "Social reformers and politicians might stew over external realities all they wished, but psychoanalysts had only to concern themselves with the internal world, of which they were the sole interpreters" (p. 75). She also poked fun at the opposition. Steinem comically

referenced oppositional beliefs of feminism when she said, “In fact, Phyllis Freud develop[ed] a sophisticated theory...*There was no difference between fantasy and reality*” (p. 75). She reiterated an oppositional attitude towards feminism again writing that it denied that: “a purpose of therapy is to help change society to fit the individual” (p. 80). She also characterized this standpoint humorously by calling it “refreshing” (p. 75). Finally, Steinem joked that “all they [the opposition] had to do was stick together” in order to continue to impose their patriarchy on women (p. 75). Steinem therefore acted as a humorist in this passage, laughing at feminists and also laughing at the opposition.

Steinem’s use of humor helped her to reach her peer group as well as third wave feminists and therefore to increase her credibility within a contemporary feminist context. Attitudinally speaking, Steinem stayed on point with feminists of all age ranges by referencing beliefs that were inevitably shared among women. For example, it would be hard to find a woman that was opposed to using the “external realities” of the world as a means to outline a feminist agenda (p. 75). Emphasizing a universal principal therefore made it safe for Steinem to make jokes about feminists. Her humor stuck to the same principle when it was about the opposition. For example, it is fair to say that calling the oppositional standpoint “refreshing” or “sophisticated” would generally be considered a joke among feminists (p. 75). Foregrounding her humor in commonly shared attitudes among feminists increased her chances of appealing to women across the generational divide. Steinem’s humor also made her relevant to contemporary feminism by addressing current issues within the movement. Specifically, her humor addressed the issue of divisiveness among women in the early 1990s. The purpose of engaging women in laughter at their own expense helped to cut some of the conflict between them, making the mood among women more congenial than adversarial. In sum, Steinem’s humor centered on shared

views within the feminist movement, which worked to her advantage and helped her appeal to a multi-generational audience. By sticking to generally agreeable themes, Steinem made it difficult to disagree with her. In this way, Steinem avoided being off-putting by highlighting non-divisive issues and keeping her jokes relatively safe. Yet, the shared attitude her humor implied made it clear that she was speaking to feminists in a contemporary way.

Finally, Steinem used an academic style in order to make the case that she was relevant to contemporary feminism. Steinem used an academic style as a way to make her attractive to older and younger feminists by essentially undercutting its agency. This showed her audience that she was on the same ideological page as them. In the early 1990s, Steinem's approach to academic feminism and the academy in general had not changed. She perceived academic feminism as limiting and favored a populist push for feminism. Thus, to make herself a feminist of "the people" in a modern setting, Steinem degraded the academic.

In order to undercut the academic, Steinem used Freud as her case study, clearly a scholarly topic. Towards this end, she wrote that, "psychoanalysts had only to concern themselves with the internal world, of which they were the sole interpreters," suggesting that the academy paid recourse to no one but one another (p. 75). This also indicated that their legitimacy was limited, especially as it applied to the lives of women. Steinem alluded to this same idea when she wrote that, "Since professional competence was to be judged exclusively by colleagues, all they had to do was stick together" (p. 75). In this way, she made a mockery of academic principles. Steinem also suggested that academic methods had no bearing on the larger world. She wrote that "trained Freudians" merely "interpret[ed] memories, feelings, and dreams," suggesting that scholarly methods were out of touch with the realities of women's lives

(p. 75). In terms of academia, Steinem suggested that it was inward looking, possessed false authority and was detached from the needs of women.

Co-opting an academic style helped Steinem to make herself relevant to contemporary feminism. As a strategy, an academic style helped Steinem in several ways. First, it maintained her ethos as a populist feminist, solidifying her commitment to reaching a broad spectrum of women by an accessible means. Steinem preserved her populist image by co-opting an academic style in order to undercut its legitimacy. Towards this end, she demonstrated that an academic style should not be confused with general knowledge and that it was largely outside the scope of contemporary feminism. Undercutting an academic style helped Steinem show that she put the needs of ordinary women first and embraced popular feminism. Second, using an academic style helped Steinem stay relevant by taking on contemporary exigencies of the feminist movement. With a rise in academic feminism, Steinem argued that there remained a need for feminism that was accessible and that worked for women, not for the academy. This helped Steinem be attractive to the current movement by being a stalwart of bottom-up feminism and essentially arguing for a non-academic feminism. Thus, Steinem used an academic style to her advantage. She suggested that the academy was not capable of generating feminist theory for “the people.” Breaking down the legitimacy of the academy helped Steinem to preserve her image as a popular feminist leader and therefore also a relevant one. Finally, she took things one step further, by outlining the important actions women should take for sustained movement in contemporary times.

Steinem’s Prescription for Change

In the third passage I analyze I argue that Steinem outlined feminism’s stakeholders and her recommendations for contemporary activism in order to undercut post-feminist/antifeminist

sentiment. By addressing the notion of backlash, Steinem addressed a central exigency of contemporary feminism. In keeping with the style of her essay, she accomplished this task by using the topic of Freudian thinking and humor. Steinem spoke to older women, reflecting her mission to tap into the activist spirit of women who grew more radical with age, as she so often contended. However, she spoke to younger women as well in order to tie her activism to contemporary feminism. Thus, Steinem claimed that neither was feminism dead nor were women across the generational divide incapable of acting together. Steinem's agenda worked in two parts. First, she described feminism's stakeholders and then she described the actions women should take.

Steinem (1994) wrote,

As well-educated women (in this day and age, perhaps I must specify that, like womankind, this generic term includes qualified men), how can we see to it that her [Phyllis Freud's] ovarian body of work keep its place as the bible of human psychology – the text to which all serious scholars must refer, and which retains its force whether it can be proved or not? I must warn you that we have our work cut out for us...On the populist side, masculinists continue to be the most entrenched and intransigent threat, for they insist that individual differences outweigh group differences, in spite of millennia of evidence to the contrary, and they challenge not only such basic tenets as breast-castration anxiety in women and womb envy in men, but even the authority of the psychoanalyst over the patient – part of their attack on hierarchy, which is so ambitious that it will surely fall of its own weight...From them we can continue to expect such bizarre, womb-envying onslaughts as the overheated attack by George Steinem, a dyspeptically aging masculinist activist, with nothing but a B.A. degree...The second

populist, nonscholarly source of danger might be summed up as the anti-Freudian therapy movement...There are also a wide variety of leaderless, democratic therapy groups based on 'shared experience' and absurd principles like 'a person who has experienced something is more expert in it than the expert.'...Still other therapy groups exist within so-called battered men's shelters...Finally, there are specifically masculinist versions of such therapies and groups that espouse a belief that turns Freud on her head perhaps spinning her in her grave: The personal is political...So you can see what we're up against here. I propose a few guidelines for protecting Phyllis Freud as *the* secular matriarchal thinker of our day. I propose them in all modesty but with an imperative: We have no time to lose. We must behave in an organized manner...We simply need to redouble our devotion to preserving Phyllis Freud's body of work, which is part of the order of the world for so many...We must write articles for and monitor professional journals, supply credentialed interviewees to the media, circulate pro-Freudian articles, make sure no criticism goes unanswered, challenge the credentials, motives, and mental health of Freud's critics, and threaten lawsuits when at all possible. Though our tone must remain scholarly, we must be popularly accessible...We should not be above talk shows and press kits. (pp. 76-83)

In this passage, Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking and humor in order to flesh out feminism's stakeholders and feminism's future course of action. She attempted to reach women of second and third wave generations.

Feminism's stakeholders for Steinem were obvious: They were women, including older and younger women. Steinem identified them as "masculinists" as well as "populist" and "nonscholarly," suggesting that feminism was non-hierarchical and membership was not

exclusive (p. 77). Steinem also characterized contemporary feminists as “radical” by their commitment to overturn foundational ideas that were influential in keeping women in an inferior position. Thus, she posed the question,

How can we see to it that her ovarian body of work keep its place as the bible of human psychology – the text to which all serious scholars must refer, and which retains its force whether it can be proved or not? (p. 76)

Therefore, Steinem carved out a feminist identity that was predicated on the notion of an inclusive sisterhood with a commitment to “radical” change. Identifying feminism’s stakeholders helped Steinem speak to a specific in-group of women. Understanding Steinem’s writing required a certain amount of decoding. This was privy only to women who were feminist and women who saw the falsity of Freudian logic, which Steinem spelled out in her essay.

After Steinem identified feminism’s stakeholders, she suggested important principles that feminists should abide by for the future. Towards this end, Steinem argued that feminists must remain united writing, “We must behave in an organized manner” (p. 81). She also suggested that women need to be active in the public sphere by writing and also by making themselves available to the media. Towards this end, Steinem wrote, “We must write articles for and monitor professional journals, supply credentialed interviewees to the media, circulate pro-Freudian articles, make sure no criticism goes unanswered...we should not be above talk shows and press kits” (pp. 82-83). Steinem indicated that it was imperative for feminism to be taken seriously, but wield popular support as well. Thus, she suggested, “we must be popularly accessible” (p. 82). Finally, Steinem implied a sense of urgency to her advocacy, suggesting that “We have no time to lose” and that feminists “need to redouble our devotion to preserving Phyllis Freud’s body of work” (p. 81)

Steinem used the topic of Freudian thinking to argue that feminist movement was imperative in a contemporary context. In this way, she addressed the notion that feminism was no longer needed. For Steinem, the topic of Freudian thinking was a vehicle for conveying the larger problem of patriarchy, which continued to plague women. Steinem contended that women faced problems on account of it and therefore feminist movement was imperative. Steinem characterized Freudian thinking as an “ovarian body of work” and “the bible of human psychology...which retains its force whether it can be proved or not” in order to explain the power it retained over women, even contemporarily (p. 76). She again spoke to the entrenched threat that women faced in patriarchy with the topic of Freudian thinking when she wrote that Phyllis Freud was “the secular matriarchal thinker of our day” and embodied “part of the order of the world for so many” (pp. 81-82). Using the topic of Freudian thinking therefore enabled Steinem to argue that feminist action was necessary. In this way, Steinem addressed the post-feminist/antifeminist sentiment that indicated feminism was no longer of use.

Steinem’s use of humor was also heavily evident in this passage in speaking to feminism’s stakeholders and the agenda that women must enact. Steinem’s humor was based on shared attitudes and beliefs that she argued were central to contemporary activism. Steinem emphasized one of their shared attitudes when she wrote that, “masculinists” “insist that individual differences outweigh group differences” (p. 77). In addition to privileging individual experience, Steinem suggested that feminists equally share in the belief that hierarchy is detrimental to women. Thus, she wrote, “They challenge not only such basic tenets as breast-castration anxiety in women and womb envy in men, but even the authority of the psychoanalyst over the patient” (p. 77). Steinem also suggested that contemporary feminists espouse the belief that “the personal is political.” In her words, “a belief that turns Freud on her head perhaps

spinning in her grave: The personal is political” (pp. 79-80). Thus, Steinem’s humor helped to spell out contemporary feminism’s core principles.

In addition, Steinem’s humor also helped warrant the need for contemporary feminism by motivating women. Steinem motivated her feminist audience in two ways. First, she motivated feminists by reminding them of their staying power, something they had earned by the 1990s. Steinem wrote, “masculinists continue to be the most entrenched and intransigent threat” (p. 77). She also celebrated them “as well-educated women” (p. 76). Steinem’s humor also worked to motivate women by joking about how the opposition perceived and talked about feminists. She wrote that the opposition believed their goals were “so ambitious” that they would fail or “fall of its own weight” (p. 77). Steinem suggested that the opposition believed feminism was based on “absurd principals” (p. 79). For example, the belief that “a person who has experienced something is more expert in it than the expert” was an “absurd principal” (p. 79). Finally, Steinem even used herself as an example. Her self-deprecating humor was quite clear when she joked, “From them [feminists] we can continue to expect such bizarre, womb-envying onslaughts as the overheated attack by George Steinem, a dyspeptically aging masculinist activist, with nothing but a B.A. degree” (p. 78). Steinem’s humor worked to motivate women to continue to act and therefore to overturn popular sentiment that suggested feminism was dead or no longer possessed a social utility. Steinem’s humor was motivating for women because it trained them to anticipate the kind of attacks that the opposition would throw at feminists to argue that the women’s movement was not important or even necessary anymore. Thus, by spelling out some of these main ideas, Steinem motivated women by educating them on the slanderous characterizations that the opposition might support. In this way, they were better prepared for the post-feminist/antifeminist attitudes of the early 1990s.

Steinem's use of humor was agreeable to her purpose of reaching older and younger women. Her comical approach was capable of bridging the generational divide because it relied on shared assumptions that were neither divisive nor hierarchal. Steinem's humor critiqued patriarchy's continuing influence on women and it also addressed fundamental feminist beliefs, such as "the personal is political." Moreover, her humor supported principles such as being "leaderless" and attending "democratic therapy groups based on shared experience" (p. 79). Sticking to core values like these enabled her to appeal to women of any age without risk of alienating a particular pocket of feminism. These themes were consonant with both waves of feminism and therefore increased her ability to reach women of older and younger generations. On a fundamental level, Steinem's jokes were predicated on the belief that feminism was just as necessary in a contemporary context as it was during the second wave of feminism. For example, her joke that "As well-educated women (in this day and age, perhaps I must specify that, like womankind, this generic term includes qualified men)," is a reminder of the fact that feminism was still warranted in the early 1990s (p. 76). Steinem's humor had wide appeal. However, her jokes would certainly not appeal to women who subscribed to truly radical forms of feminism. Moreover, Steinem's humor was formulated to reach feminists and not just women in general. To understand the jokes she made, one had to believe that the movement was an important social impetus in a contemporary context and one had to abide by enduring qualities of the mainstream feminist movement that supported democratic leadership and experiential knowledge.

Conclusion

In 1994, Gloria Steinem turned sixty years old, a milestone in her eyes. In *Moving Beyond Words* (1994), she reflected, "Age is supposed to create more serenity, calm, and detachment from the world, right? Well, I'm finding just the reverse. The older I get, the more

intensely I feel about the world around me” (p. 249). Steinem’s perspective was more “radical” than ever in her pioneering essay, “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” where she argued that Freudian belief was not only damaging in and of itself but also problematic because it has wreaked havoc on the lives of women, perpetuated a masculine/feminine binary, and helped to cement the language of domination in the United States. However, Steinem’s problems were bigger than Freud. She faced a fragmented movement with an increasingly changing platform. The demographics of the movement had changed as well. Steinem’s audience now included third wave feminists in addition to her peer group. Moreover, a post-feminist and antifeminist backlash continued to suggest that feminism did not even matter any more. By relying on 1) the topic of Freudian thinking, 2) humor, and 3) an academic style, Steinem appealed to women across the generational divide, attacking foundational problems of sexism and suggesting shared solutions.

Steinem’s use of the topic of Freudian thinking helped her reach a multi-generational audience. Steinem mainly used it as a vehicle for illuminating foundational problems of sexism, especially the biological rationale. She suggested that the biological rationale played a pivotal role in continuing to oppress women, even in a contemporary context. In “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Steinem warned women young and old that the agency of the biological rationale should not be underestimated and that it should be dismantled. Steinem’s use of humor also helped her achieve her purpose of bridging second and third wave women. Her comical approach to feminism helped to educate and motivate women by preparing them for the rhetorical agenda of the opposition. By keeping her jokes on topic with feminism’s core principles, Steinem’s humor resonated with older as well as younger women. Finally, Steinem’s use of an academic style also enabled her to coalesce women in a shared style of activism, in addition to content.

Chapter 4

Evaluating “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?”

Introduction

In 2002, *Ms.* celebrated its thirtieth birthday by featuring its “best” pieces since the magazine’s inception. Among the essays featured were Steinem’s “If Men Could Menstruate” (1978). Steinem’s newer piece – “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” (1994) did not make the cut. Although the essays share a similar rhetorical inventiveness, “If Men Could Menstruate” remains an important piece of feminist prose because it addresses a universal problem faced by women and possesses an enduring consciousness-raising quality. Why didn’t “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” make the list? Certainly *Ms.* staffers had a wealth of pieces to choose from, but I submit that the essay’s absence can be attributed to more than the magazine’s archival abundance. In this chapter I argue that “If Men Could Menstruate” has staying power while “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” fails to have lasting resonance. Towards this end, I consider the strengths and limitations of the rhetorical strategies Steinem used in each essay given the historical context in which she wrote. I also evaluate the success or failure of each essay in terms of its staying power given the rhetorical strategies Steinem employed.

“If Men Could Menstruate” (1978/1983)

“If Men Could Menstruate” is a well-known piece of feminist rhetoric. As its selection for *Ms.*’s thirtieth anniversary issue indicates, it is a favorite among *Ms.* readers, and for this reason alone the essay is clearly memorable. When “If Men Could Menstruate” was published again in 1983 for Steinem’s first book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, it was praised. Take, for example, Fritz’s (1983) review of Steinem’s book where she lauded the author “for her confident and faithful outreach to those millions of women (and men) who still have trouble

accepting feminism as a serious political philosophy” (p. 7). In 1994, when Steinem published *Moving Beyond Words*, reviewers still had praise for “If Men Could Menstruate” sixteen years after it first appeared in print. Fichtner (1994) referred to it as a “classic salvo at the treachery of gender stereotyping” and suggested that “the piece showcases the activist-writer-editor at her best – courageous, articulate, clever, precise and often hilarious” (p. 8). Steinem’s essay also received praise from rhetorical critics. Campbell (1998) called “If Men Could Menstruate” a “particular favorite,” and “a classic example of one of the richest and oldest sources of rhetorical invention – symbolic reversal” (p. 113). “In its small but important way, this example,” Campbell (1998) remarked, “with its ironic, even impudent, revelation of how identity is socially constructed, illustrates the ways in which reversal and parody raise consciousness by calling perceived wisdom into question” (p. 114). The accolades that Steinem received for this essay are not unwarranted. I argue that this essay succeeded within a range of contexts and has great staying power because it addresses a universal problem faced by women and because it possesses an enduring consciousness-raising quality. I support my contention by accounting for the rhetorical strategies that Steinem used: 1) humor, 2) the topic of menstruation, 3) focusing on a range of issues, and 4) ordinary dialogue.

The humor in “If Men Could Menstruate” is readily apparent. The “laugh out loud” quality to the essay renders it memorable in the short-term and long-term. When considering her immediate exigency, Steinem’s humor helped her address gender stereotypes that were taken as a thing of the past by the late 1970s and early 1980s on account of second wave feminism successes. Steinem addressed conventional wisdom about women in order to make the case that sexist assumptions ran rampant in the public sphere and continued to block women’s social progress. Moreover, through humor Steinem suggested that essentialist assumptions about

gender portrayed women negatively and denied them equal opportunity. Thus, her humor “turn[ed] the tables” in order to illuminate the problems that women continued to face (Steinem, 1994, p. 24). Steinem’s jokes conveyed that patriarchal thinking oppressed women as a group and prevented them from being fully humanized.

Steinem’s humor helped make her point for a late 1970s/early 1980s audience and it sustained her case for years to come. Steinem’s tactic of using humor enabled her to make the argument about gender stereotyping anew. This was necessary given that the general public started to see the notion of sexism or the necessity of feminism for that matter as a belabored or ephemeral issue during the latter years of the second wave. As Cohen (1982) pointed out in a *Washington Post* editorial, “It is remarkable how feminism gets treated like hula hoops for women – just another fad” (p. C1). The inventiveness of Steinem’s humor avoided this trap by reversing sex roles. It was a creative and poignant means to a political end.

Steinem’s humor continues to appeal because it attempts to dismantle a foundational attitude about gender inequality: women are biologically inferior to men. Steinem refuses to believe that a biological rationale is legitimate evidence for sanctioning women’s inequality or a sufficient means for supporting a masculine/feminine binary, which generalizes about the sexes and carries broader social and political implications. Although some of Steinem’s references to popular culture may fade, her point about the absurdity of “patriarchal wisdom” is enduring. Her humor confronts the notion that such wisdom is actually factual. In poking fun at this “wisdom,” Steinem makes it laughable and something *not* to be taken seriously. Given that her humor addresses the longstanding problem of gender stereotyping, Steinem imbued “If Men Could Menstruate” with a sense of staying power. Steinem’s humor resonates beyond its original appearance(s) in print because of its relationship to a foundational attitude about women that is

arguably still present today to a certain degree. Her jokes are just as funny now as they were then because they are contingent on dislodging a fundamental attitude that was and to some extent still is espoused.

The topic of menstruation helped Steinem's essay succeed in an immediate way and in an enduring sense as well. In using menstruation as the theme of her essay, Steinem gave her rhetoric broad appeal, which was essential given the fragmented nature of the feminist movement and the abundance of sub-groups within the movement during the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Topically speaking, menstruation helped to ensure a broad readership of women because it served as common ground despite ideological differences. Steinem avoided polarizing her audience who may identify with a particular strand of feminism by appealing to her readers as women. The topic of menstruation reached women on the basis of experiential knowledge and did not attempt to attract readers on the basis of what kind of feminist they were or what their background was. Therefore, the apolitical nature to the topic of menstruation helped Steinem reach a broad swath of women without compromising a female constituency on account of ideological grounds or demography. This was essential during the time in which she wrote given the splintered nature of the feminist movement over its substantive issues as well as its rhetorical agenda.

The same can be said for the topic of menstruation in terms of a contemporary audience. One reason Steinem's essay continues to endure and be praised contemporarily is because the topic of menstruation is not context bound and certainly does not go out of fashion. It addresses a physiological process that will be around just as long as there are women. The topic of menstruation therefore confounds issues of relevancy or timeliness. It is enduring because it addresses a shared experience that includes women of almost any age. Moreover, appealing to

readers on the basis of the topic of menstruation gives Steinem's essay staying power even when feminism fails to be "popular" because it reaches readers *as women*, not necessarily as feminists. Thus, the essay continually possesses a consciousness-raising quality to it in speaking to readers in terms of their sex, not their politics.

Steinem's focus on a range of issues also contributed to the success of "If Men Could Menstruate" in an immediate way and in collective memory. Steinem tackled a range of issues from substantive political agenda items to popular culture and everyday scenarios. By taking feminism out of its "home" in traditional, political activism or "the ivory tower," she gave the movement broader appeal in illustrating its relationship to society at large. Steinem's approach makes it difficult to surrender to stereotypes that suggested feminism was for the privileged few or that argued bottom-up change was impossible. Focusing on a range of issues helped to convey that feminism affected all women. This was an especially wise choice on Steinem's part given that she sought to appeal to committed feminists *and* those women (and men) who were not previously converts to the movement. Likewise, articulating feminism in broad strokes through a range of issues enabled Steinem to reach those who perceived the movement as passé or unimportant. In showing that gender inequality was all around us, from our government to the television programs we watch, Steinem made it impossible not to "see" sexism in the public or the private realm.

The range of issues that Steinem attached feminism to can also help explain why "If Men Could Menstruate" is an enduring feminist text. In suggesting that gender inequity was more or less everywhere, Steinem avoided embedding the movement within a particular context and she steered clear of fixating feminism on one particular agenda item. The omnipresent quality that Steinem gives to the movement lends her essay appeal beyond the short term. Gender inequality

in the public realm of government or the workplace and sexism in relationships as well as mindsets endures. In using a range of issues, Steinem's essay addresses longstanding problems rather than short-lived conflicts. Women of younger generations can easily find common ground with the issues that Steinem raised by way of this rhetorical strategy.

The ordinary dialogue that Steinem used in "If Men Could Menstruate" contributed to the success of her essay. Dialogue played several important roles. It addressed problems that were internal and external to the feminist movement. Internally speaking, ordinary dialogue served as Steinem's warning to women that they should monitor their own talk. Steinem's use of dialogue also pointed out the similarities women shared as feminists. In light of the contentious nature of feminism during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Steinem's emphasis on their sameness was called for in order to transcend ideological divides in the movement. The ordinary dialogue had an external function as well. Given that men enacted much of the dialogue, Steinem helped to illustrate women's larger societal invisibility. From men speaking in the streets to men assuming positions of power, their talk defined the status quo. Thus, Steinem's use of ordinary dialogue also helped to show that there was more work to be done. This counteracted the public perception that suggested the feminist movement was over and served as a motivating device for women to keep going. The ordinary dialogue in "If Men Could Menstruate" addressed some of Steinem's immediate exigencies.

Steinem's use of dialogue makes her essay a success in the long term as well. Like her other strategies, the use of dialogue has broader implications that transcend the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The notion of talk remains an important indicator of women's participation in the public sphere and stresses that their voices, along with men's, ought to be in the foreground. Dialogue also emphasizes that women's visibility matters when it comes to private issues as

well. Thus, through her use of ordinary dialogue, Steinem's essay serves as a powerful litmus test of women's participation, wherever it may be. The voiceless-ness that Steinem found in 1978/1983 endures as a problem faced by women, even contemporarily, and therefore her dialogue strategy contributes to her essay resonating in the bigger picture.

The rhetorical strategies that Steinem used in "If Men Could Menstruate" made her essay succeed in the short term and for generations to come. Although I argue that "If Men Could Menstruate" succeeds in being memorable, the rhetorical strategies that Steinem used possess shortcomings. The first disadvantage of the essay is Steinem's topic choice of menstruation. While this topic appeals to most women, it clearly does not speak directly to men because it requires experiential knowledge that men are not privy to. This limits Steinem's ability to make her argument accessible to men and appeal to a male constituency for their support as well. Furthermore, Steinem's topic choice is limited in terms of its ability to speak to every woman. It espouses a certain "shock" value, not in terms of the topic itself but because she was writing about menstruation in a very public way. Steinem's choice to use menstruation certainly has its advantages, but some women could interpret her choice as crass, embarrassing or downright inappropriate.

The second disadvantage to Steinem's rhetorical strategy relates again to men. Her approach may perpetuate the stereotype that feminists are "man haters." This stereotype has the potential to emerge from Steinem's essay because she overtly pokes fun at men and makes them a proverbial feminist punching bag. Steinem's jokes all center on men. She makes fun of what they would do and say if they menstruated. Through her humor, Steinem suggests that men think they are superior to women and have a more valuable voice in public and private settings. In this way, Steinem aligns her essay with the common assumption that feminists dislike or hate men.

Subsequently, Steinem shuts down the position that men can be friends to feminists and not merely foes. This is essentializing and not representative of all men in 1978/1983. At that time, there was a fair amount of “liberated” men who espoused the belief that gender inequity was a problem that ought to be eradicated from society. If Steinem sought male support, her rhetorical strategy was not the best means to do so. The confrontative quality to the topic of menstruation coupled with humor at the expense of men may limit her essay’s appeal to an audience of both women and men.

“What If Freud Were Phyllis?” (1994)

Steinem’s (1994) essay “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” was not as successful as “If Men Could Menstruate.” Although I argue that this essay failed in being memorable for a sustained period of time, its publication did receive some praise. For example, in Gollub’s review of *Moving Beyond Words*, he suggested that “this enjoyable essay should be required reading for all practitioners and trainees in the field of psychotherapy as a necessary balance to Freud’s teachings” (1994, p. 1836). Yet, Gollub’s review is also evidence for why I suggest that “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” is not an enduring piece of feminist rhetoric. That is, it fails to have resonance with a broad audience. Barber’s review captures this point well when she writes, “Of course, there are ‘problems’ (to put it mildly) in Freud’s attitude to women, but they are not likely to become acute unless one is in analysis” (1994, p. 3). Other reviews indicate that Steinem missed the mark by centering her essay on Freud, which distracted from her real purpose of addressing gender stereotyping. As Elshtain (1994) writes, “Steinem alternately pities, trashes and scorns [Freud]...As if this weren’t enough – and I am only skimming the surface of this hatchet job” (p. 35). Steinem’s style was also criticized in “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Corrigan (1994) found Steinem’s humor rather humorless, suggesting that, “It’s a one-

note joke that doesn't allow for much nuance" (p. 37). Moreover, her approach was characterized as "demanding" and even inappropriate: "[Steinem] has taken her gender-reversal tricks all the way to the horizon" (p. 8). These critiques speak to the fact that the failure of Steinem's essay to resonate in the long-term can be accounted for on the basis of the rhetorical strategies she used: 1) the topic of Freudian thinking, 2) humor, and 3) an academic style.

The topic of Freudian thinking prevented Steinem's essay from being fully successful in an immediate and long-lasting way. In the short-term, the topic of Freudian thinking made it difficult for Steinem to capture her target audience of younger as well as older generations of female readers because of issues related to timeliness and relevance. Contemporarily, Freud's legacy is perceived in two ways. Some feminists give Freud minimal if any authority.

Conversely, other women have re-appropriated Freud for a feminist agenda. Elshtain (1994) writes, "She [Steinem] seems completely unaware that dozens of contemporary scholars with impeccable feminist credentials are inventively bringing Freud to bear on their own work" (p. 32). Both of these aspects to the topic of Freudian thinking render it an unappealing means to convey a feminist message on account of the fact that there is no one attitude among women toward Freud. Had Steinem's essay appeared in the early days of second wave feminism when debunking Freud was more in step with society, her strategy would have helped her purposes. However, the "sex-change operation on Sigmund Freud" that Steinem undertook was written about thirty years too late (Corrigan, 1994, p. 37). Steinem's use of the topic of Freudian thinking also did not help her achieve her political goal because it is unlikely that Freud resonates with young women, especially third wave feminists whose agenda is predicated partially on defining issues in new ways without paying recourse to their second wave sisters. The topic of Freudian thinking is more in the past than it is a newsworthy tool for creating a

feminist text.

The topic of Freudian thinking also contributes to the lack of staying power of “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Steinem’s choice to use Freud as her impetus for feminism is difficult even in the short term given that the topic may not resonate with women because it goes beyond the realm of common knowledge and is more opaque than transparent in communicating feminist values. Thus, it is fair to say that its legacy will not change for a future-oriented understanding of “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Moreover, given the changing attitudes toward Freud over the years, the topic’s consistency is unreliable. This makes it shaky ground at best from which to generate theory or draw conclusions about the status of women, especially in the long term. The polysemous nature to the topic of Freudian thinking renders it fickle as a rhetorical strategy. It fails to have the same straightforward resonance and easy recognition that the topic of menstruation does.

Steinem’s use of humor in “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” is also partially to blame when it comes to her essay not being as memorable as “If Men Could Menstruate.” The potential of Steinem’s humor to address a broad swath of women is limited because of its departure from personal experience and because the humor is beholden to its original purpose of speaking to a narrow demographic. Thus, whether perceived in an immediate sense or from a longitudinal perspective, the humor in this essay does not elicit the same amount of laughter that her earlier one does. The humor in “If Men Could Menstruate” worked because it was incongruous to female readers, but embedded in personal experience. Although in “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Steinem’s humor maintained a sense of incongruity, her jokes did not have an immediate relationship to women in the way the menstruation jokes did. In fact, I argue that Steinem’s humor was at its best in “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” when the subject matter was

most familiar to her female readers. For example, her self-deprecating humor about the “bizarre, womb-envying onslaughts” from “George Steinem, a dyspeptically aging masculinist activist, with nothing but a B.A. degree” evidences Steinem at her funniest because it implies a level of familiarity that is lacking in the rest of her essay (1994, p. 78). In “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” the premise of Steinem’s humor required more work on the part of the reader in order to “get” the punch line. That the humor fails to come easily does not lend well to the essay’s short-term or long-standing credibility as a memorable piece of feminist prose. Steinem’s humor also fails to resonate because it does not speak to a broad audience. Given that Steinem’s “biography” of “Phyllis” was originally aimed at psychiatrists, her humor does not speak to a broader audience of ordinary women and remains somewhat tied to its original historical exigency. Her jokes are more likely to get a chuckle out of someone within the psychiatry profession because they are about Freud. That prerequisite, however, sets up a hurdle for her general female audience that prevents a broad readership from understanding the jokes.

Finally, the academic style of Steinem’s writing made it difficult for her essay to have staying power. In using an academic style, Steinem’s essay lessened its ability to reach a wide variety of female readers. Its length, subject matter and extensive footnotes turn reading Steinem’s essay into an arduous exercise. In being “academic” “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” restricts Steinem’s readership to women with at least some level of familiarity with Freud in order to commit to reading 70 pages on the topic. The academic style of Steinem’s essay also demands that one read the footnotes, often including Steinem’s research on Freud. These qualities fail to give her essay a populist tone, like in “If Men Could Menstruate.” Moreover, Steinem’s academic style is not necessarily academic. As Elshtain (1994) remarks, “She invents words and make-believe ‘scholarly’ footnotes” (p. 33). Thus, if Steinem were trying to reach a

more learned audience, her attempts to be scholarly are ill served as well. Steinem's academic style in "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" was also not in line with her persona as a feminist activist and writer. Steinem has long prided herself on being accessible and making her writing available to the masses. Her use of an academic style in this essay is a reversal of her commitment to explain feminism on ordinary terms in order to inform women, and even men, from all walks of life. "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" is out of step with Steinem's style. It negates the essay's ability to be instructive, consciousness-raising or even coalescing of women. An academic underpinning asks more of the reader than necessary. This can be evidenced in the length of the essay, its cumbersome footnotes, its attempt at being scholarly and its attachment to an inaccessible subject matter. Steinem's academic style prohibits "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" from being successful in an enduring way.

Broader Implications for Touchstone Texts

Examination of "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" provides for some important conclusions about the nature of touchstone texts. In this chapter I have argued that Steinem's first essay has lasting appeal while "What If Freud Were Phyllis" fails to resonate in the long-term because the former essay speaks to an enduring problem faced by women and carries forth a consciousness-raising quality that continues to apply to women contemporarily. "If Men Could Menstruate" is clearly a text that transcends its immediate historical context and is a standout in collective memory. Therefore, we can look at this text as a "touchstone" of feminist rhetoric on account of its substance and style. Thus, I offer the following implications regarding the nature of touchstone texts given the enduring quality of "If Men Could Menstruate," in comparison to "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" which failed to resonate in collective memory.

The first lesson that we can take from “If Men Could Menstruate” is that touchstone texts of feminist criticism address women’s fundamental condition or position in society. For Steinem, that meant centering her essay on the problem of the biological rationale, which has long been used as a justification for sanctioning gender inequality. Taking issue with a fundamental rather than particular problem gives a feminist text a pedagogical edge and coaches women and men for years to come. In terms of “If Men Could Menstruate,” we can refer back to it as a marker of women’s status during the second wave of feminism and we can also extract important lessons from it that apply today. Thus, dealing with a paramount issue rather than a trendy or fleeting one helps to ensure that a text has longitudinal appeal. Although “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” also examined the roots of sexism, it was ultimately tied to more specific exigencies having to do with the psychiatric profession. By addressing a problem that anchors sexism, Steinem gave “If Men Could Menstruate” broader and enduring appeal.

The second lesson that we can take from “If Men Could Menstruate” is that touchstone texts of feminist criticism are enduring on account of their content. That is, they have a memorable quality to them given their substantive matter. The obvious example from “If Men Could Menstruate” is Steinem’s choice to center her essay on menstruation. The nature of her content is memorable because it speaks to something that is not normally talked about but is widely known. Steinem therefore takes on a topic that has been relatively silenced in the public sphere. In bringing menstruation to the fore, her essay is memorable for addressing the silences surrounding women in public discourse. Touchstone texts of feminist criticism are therefore worth remembering on account of their content.

The third lesson that we can take from “If Men Could Menstruate” is that touchstone texts of feminist criticism have a memorable style. Steinem’s use of humor specifically makes

this a touchstone text on account of her style. Through humor, she attacks the logic of patriarchy and exposes its absurdity. Her style remains timely because it addresses an attitude that continues to have a stake today given that sexism still exists. Thus, Steinem's humor is a memorable means to dislodge a fundamentally flawed position that has contemporary resonance. Touchstone texts of feminist criticism do not have to use humor. However, they do require a forward thinking style toward expressing a political end, like Steinem exemplifies in "If Men Could Menstruate."

Conclusion

"If Men Could Menstruate" is an important enduring text of the feminist movement. The staying power of Steinem's text can be accounted for by examining the rhetorical strategies that she used. Through the topic of menstruation, humor, a wide range of issues and public dialogue, Steinem helped to explain a very simple notion: "Whatever a 'superior' group has will be used to justify its superiority, and what an 'inferior' group has will be used to justify its plight" (1983, p. 366). Steinem painted a clear picture of this in "If Men Could Menstruate," demonstrating the truly illogical nature to gender inequality and its many manifestations in the world in which we live. Her argument was simple but the end result was poignant and above all, memorable. The lessons that one could extract from Steinem's essay then are still applicable today. In attacking fundamental notions of gender stereotyping, Steinem undercuts beliefs that were and in some sense today still are taken as "nature." As she pointed out in *Moving Beyond Words* (1994), "Gender is the remaining caste system that still cuts deep enough, and spreads wide enough, to be confused with the laws of nature" (p. 25). It could be argued that once women have had their consciousnesses raised, an essay like "If Men Could Menstruate" is not needed. However, I contend that "If Men Could Menstruate" will continue to have a place in the tradition of feminist rhetoric and in popular culture with each new generation of women as well as men. It serves as a

constant reminder that women are fully human and stand on equal grounding with men. The message of “If Men Could Menstruate” will only go out of style when gender inequality no longer exists. Steinem is hopeful about this. She argues that sexism is ultimately escapable but it depends on women. In Steinem’s words, “The truth is that, if men could menstruate, the power justifications would go on and on. *If we let them*” (1983, p. 369).

On the other hand, “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” is not nearly as successful. Although its aim was much the same, the rhetorical strategies that Steinem used obfuscate her point and make the task of getting there a difficult one. Her message is muddled in the complexities of Freud, humor that depends on specialized knowledge in order to be funny, and an academic style that makes her essay more of a chore than a pleasure to read. What is more, it goes against the style that Steinem has become famous for: her ability to convey a feminist message to a far-reaching demographic, remaining eloquent without compromising substance. “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” remain significant rhetorical acts in their own right, but it is the former essay’s ability to be transcendent that gives it longevity.

Chapter 5

Concluding Remarks on Steinem's Rhetoric

Gloria Steinem remains a well-known figurehead of the feminist movement. Even today, at age seventy-five, Steinem continues her activism. It is not uncommon to come across her name in print or see her on television advocating on behalf of women. She continues her feminist advocacy mostly by writing and by collaborating with other feminist groups. Steinem still garners criticism as well as reverence for her feminist activism. In terms of her political activity, Steinem was a strong supporter of Hillary Clinton's candidacy in the 2008 Democratic Primary contest. Her piece in the *New York Times* put a spotlight on the issue of sexism, especially on account of women's participation in national politics. Steinem (2008) wrote,

The woman in question became a lawyer after some years as a community organizer, married a corporate lawyer and is the mother of two little girls, ages 9 and 6...She served as a state legislator for eight years, and became an inspirational voice for national unity. Be honest: Do you think this is the biography of someone who could be elected to the United States Senate? After less than one term there, do you believe she could be a viable candidate to head the most powerful nation on earth?...If the lawyer described above had been just as charismatic but named, say, Achola Obama instead of Barack Obama, her goose would have been cooked long ago. (p. 23)

Steinem's rhetorical style, as evidenced in the *New York Times* piece, illustrates her mainstay technique of role reversal to make a point about gender inequity.

Her politics appeared in print again in a 2008 *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece, this time in regards to Sarah Palin. Steinem (2008) declared, "Sarah Palin shares nothing but a chromosome with Hillary Clinton...She is Phyllis Schlafly, only younger" (p. 1). In addition to

her involvement in national politics, Steinem continues to speak to audiences across the country about feminism. In anticipation of her appearance with other notable feminists at a Florida college, Bancroft (2008) reported in the *St. Petersburg Times*, “She is in her fifth decade of working feminist causes, including reproductive rights, child care and equal pay, and a range of other political issues” (p. 1E).

Beyond her activity in the feminist movement, Steinem remains relevant in terms of her symbolic resonance. To some, Steinem is an icon of feminism, while more conservative audiences regard her negatively. Last year she was lauded as a “feminist foremother” and also criticized for “trying to impose gender discipline and a call to order on the sisters” (Martin & Siegel, 2008, p. B3; Dowd, 2008, p. 23). Thus, in many ways, Steinem’s role today is much the same, just a bit scaled back. She continues to be a fervent supporter of feminism for “the masses,” and consequently, she is beloved by her supporters and loathed by her critics.

Steinem’s commitment to the feminist movement is well documented. Thus, it is odd that in spite of the critical role she has occupied for nearly five decades of feminist activism, there exists a limited amount of rhetorical analyses of her work, especially beyond *Ms.* magazine. Therefore, I submit that a closer examination of Steinem’s rhetoric is called for on account of the pivotal role her advocacy played during the second wave of feminism (and beyond), given that Steinem’s texts are foundational to the feminist movement and finally because Steinem addresses fundamental problems in these texts regarding gender inequity that continue to demand critical attention. Thus, the purpose of this thesis has been to analyze a sampling of her feminist rhetoric by way of “If Men Could Menstruate” (1978/1983) and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” (1994). Both of these texts received ample praise and were well received by women and the popular press generally.

In this thesis I found that while both texts are worth examining in their own right, “If Men Could Menstruate” is a touchstone of feminist rhetoric because it addresses a universal problem faced by women and possesses an enduring consciousness-raising quality, while “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” is not a touchstone text. “If Men Could Menstruate” spoke to a feminist audience in its original context(s) and continues to resonate with women today. Thus, in this project I have sought to examine more fully a crucially important rhetor of the feminist movement by focusing on iconic texts, one of which has an enduring quality as a timeless message. In this chapter I will provide a summary of my thesis and discuss limitations to my study as well as directions for future research.

Summary

For this thesis, I examined “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” For the second chapter, I analyzed “If Men Could Menstruate” from a historical-descriptive perspective. I first set up the historical context in which Steinem wrote. I identified internal and external barriers relative to the feminist movement. Internally, the feminist movement was increasingly stratified and ideologically divided. Splits among women centered on arguments over the best direction for the movement in terms of substantive issues and a rhetorical agenda. Externally, the feminist movement encountered a vocal and well-organized opposition. Women like Phyllis Schlafly helped deter feminist efforts to pass the ERA in state-by-state campaigns. In terms of Steinem’s life specifically, by 1978 she was extremely active in the movement and oftentimes labeled “the face” of feminism. In addition to speaking tours, grassroots organizing and her involvement in national politics, Steinem’s feminist magazine *Ms.* was also doing quite well. In 1978, Steinem took a Woodrow Wilson fellowship to work on her first book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. “If Men Could Menstruate” was among

the essays she chose for her book. Thus, Steinem faced constraining forces within and beyond the feminist movement that she had to overcome in articulating a feminist message in “If Men Could Menstruate.”

In the second chapter, I argue that in “If Men Could Menstruate” Steinem created non-academic feminist theory. She introduced a theory for all women by setting up a “political fantasy” in which men menstruated. In “If Men Could Menstruate” Steinem drew upon four rhetorical strategies that worked together to support and enact her theory. She relied on 1) the topic of menstruation, 2) humor, 3) the everyday, and 4) dialogue. Together, these strategies enabled Steinem to speak to a broad swath of women in a non-academic tone. In “If Men Could Menstruate” Steinem showed women their relative voiceless-ness, and in this way, suggested that there was work to be done yet in the feminist movement on account of the fact that oppressive, patriarchal “logic” continued to sanction gender inequality. “If Men Could Menstruate” endures as a touchstone piece of feminist criticism. Her text has longevity because it tackles foundational attitudes about gender and is consciousness-raising. Even though these attitudes have been written-off and undermined to a degree, they have not been obliterated. The rhetorical strategies that Steinem used enable her message to have resonance in a contemporary setting.

For the third chapter of my thesis, I focused on Steinem’s essay “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” Like “If Men Could Menstruate” I approached this text from a historical-descriptive perspective. The historical context in which Steinem wrote was very different from that of the previous essay. By 1994, the feminist movement changed significantly. In terms of the movement, the early 1990s welcomed a new wave of activism, known as third wave feminism. Third wave activists critiqued the notion of “sisterhood” and sought to establish an agenda that

focused on women's intersectional identities. Conflict within the feminist movement was presumed and therefore the notion of unification among feminists was a near impossibility. Outside of the movement, the relevancy of feminist activism was questioned. Feminism was perceived as a non-issue and in popular culture the movement was overshadowed by the notion of "post-feminism," which subscribed to the attitude that feminism was no longer necessary. In terms of Steinem's role within the movement, she continued her writing and activism. However, she was no longer "the star" of the movement. Although she was regarded as a preeminent feminist by her female peers, many younger, third wave feminists considered Steinem a "dinosaur" and found her method of attacking foundational issues about sexism rather irrelevant. The changing state of the movement and Steinem's questionable ethos among third wave feminists made her message in "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" a tough sell.

In the third chapter, I argue that Steinem's "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" functions as a unifying text that bridges second wave and third wave feminists. Steinem's concern with the foundations of gender inequity focused on its cause, its pervasive nature, and the problems it sustained contemporarily. By relying on 1) the topic of Freudian thinking, 2) humor, and 3) an academic style, Steinem appealed to women across the generational divide, attacking foundational problems of sexism and suggesting shared solutions. Steinem focused on the substantive and rhetorical challenges faced by feminists in a contemporary setting, including popular attitudes that undermined their efforts. One major detrimental attitude, Steinem argued, was the persistence of the biological rationale. Steinem's approach helped her to reach second wave and third wave feminists alike. Her message was instructive to newer entrants to the movement and it reminded both generations that foundational, feminist attitudes should not get lost on women in a contemporary setting. Although I submit that Steinem's strategy did unify

two generations of women, I suggest that “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” fails to be a touchstone piece of feminist rhetoric. “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” does not emulate the populist tone or message of “If Men Could Menstruate” and is not nearly as consciousness-raising. Moreover, its academic posture, presentation and content limit the feminists (and potential feminists) that Steinem can reach. Thus, even though it overcame barriers in context, “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” is not a mainstay text in the same way “If Men Could Menstruate” is.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are a few limitations to this thesis. These limitations prompt directions for future research. The first limitation is that I focused on two of Steinem’s iconic writings. I honed in on two of Steinem’s writings because of their memorable content and style. Moreover, two of Steinem’s texts provided a wealth of information to work with and use for rhetorical analysis. Focusing on two texts also enabled me to examine Steinem’s rhetoric in depth. Although this approach allowed me to become well versed on “If Men Could Menstruate” and “What If Freud Were Phyllis?” it did not afford analysis of a wider survey of Steinem’s writings. Given this limitation, a direction for future research would include examining a larger sampling of Steinem’s literature in order to assess whether or not she uses a similar constellation of strategies. This would provide insights about her style and possibly about the generic features of touchstone texts of feminist rhetoric.

The second limitation is that I approached this project from a historical-descriptive perspective. I used a historical-descriptive perspective in order to illuminate how Steinem’s rhetoric worked in context and in order to understand how Steinem overcame barriers given the rhetorical strategies that she used. A historical-descriptive approach also enabled me to understand the complex and rich context in which Steinem wrote these texts. Although this

approach allowed me to be well acquainted with the historical context in which Steinem wrote and the potential barriers she faced, my project did not involve a theory-building agenda. Thus, this project could be enriched from a theory-building angle. Theory could be devised regarding the nature of feminist touchstone texts and the symbolic function of Steinem's rhetoric. Towards this end, another future direction for research is to examine "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" with a theory-building goal in mind.

A third limitation is that this project focused on the rhetoric of one feminist rhetor. Steinem's rhetoric is not entirely illustrative of second wave feminism given her background as a white woman of relative means. Thus, another direction for future research entails examining Steinem in relation to other feminist rhetors of the day. When Steinem wrote during the second wave of feminism, women like Robyn Morgan, Shirley Chisholm, Flo Kennedy and Bella Abzug were also advocating for feminism and produced works of their own. Focusing on a broad range of second wave feminist rhetoric in the future could more fully establish the distinctive workings of Steinem's rhetorical style by comparing her to other texts of the day. Moreover, examining new and different voices in the feminist movement would bring women on "the fringes" to the center of feminist rhetorical scholarship. These directions for future research can be incorporated into my research program.

Conclusion

Gloria Steinem's place in the canon of feminist rhetoric can be firmly established on account of "If Men Could Menstruate" and "What If Freud Were Phyllis?" The rhetoric of Steinem is ultimately important for its argumentative force and for its wide-reaching, practical implications. Steinem's inventiveness of style is noteworthy. Often through the unusual blending of humor and "shocking" topic choices along with everyday matters, Steinem conveyed the most

foundational ideas pertinent to keeping the women's movement afloat and moving forward. Steinem's approach to feminist argument illustrates memorable prose and life-long lessons for women and arguably for the general public more broadly given her message of women's universal humanity on equal standing with men's. Not only is Steinem's rhetoric praiseworthy for its stylistic and substantive matter. Her rhetoric is duly memorable for its ability to popularize feminism and to convey a feminist message to the masses. Steinem was and continues to be a champion of feminism that resonates widely and her sticking points, especially in "If Men Could Menstruate," speak to this notion. Although Steinem's voice was one of many that emerged during the second wave of feminism, her advocacy was front and center and consequently reached a broad audience. The fact that Steinem's rhetoric resonates contemporarily is only further evidence that her message is enduring, instructive and an overall compelling one. Her credibility in the academy and in popular culture alike suggests that her argumentation will likely be worthy of rhetorical analysis and popular appeal for years to come.

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